Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

AISI

Handbook for AISI Cycle 5 Projects 2012 – 2015

AISI Education Partners

January 2012

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ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

AISI Education Partners.
Handbook for AISI cycle 5 projects, 2012-2015 / AISI Education Partners.

Available online: http://education.alberta.ca/media/6657808/handbook_for_aisi_cycle_5_projects.pdf

ISBN 978-0-7785-9740-7 (Print)
ISBN 978-0-7785-9830-5 (Online)

1. School improvement programs – Alberta – Handbooks, manuals, etc.
2. Educational change – Alberta. I. Title. II. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.

LB2822.84.C2 A333 2012 371.207

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"AISI is an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today." (*The Learning Mosaic* Summary Report, page 17)[1]

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has been one of Alberta's success stories for more than a decade. When you visit classrooms, schools or school authorities across this province, you hear about and see what AISI projects have done to improve student engagement, learning and performance. Alberta universities have conducted research about what has been happening in AISI and the findings have been published and presented locally, nationally and internationally. AISI has been talked about and written about by international researchers as an example of exceptional work in the field of education. It is a bold approach to improving student learning by encouraging teachers, parents and the broader community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative projects that address local needs. AISI has clearly had a significant impact on education in Alberta and beyond.

Initiated in 1999 by the Alberta Government and its partners, AISI provides targeted funding to school authorities to improve student engagement, learning and performance. Since its inception, school authorities (public, separate, Francophone, charter and private) have initiated about two thousand projects that address local needs and circumstances. Summaries and reports of these projects are on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/aisi.

After four successful three-year cycles (2000 – 2012), AISI is now in its fifth cycle (2012 – 2015).

The AISI Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC)[2] recognized that the foundation for developing Cycle 5 is exceptionally strong. The committee also acknowledged that education is changing and so AISI must be kept vibrant and relevant. The first four cycles provided a solid foundation for innovation, enhanced professional practice, and an emerging culture of research and inquiry, collaboration, responsiveness and improvement. Cycle 5 must build on this foundation and expand into new areas to address the emerging and future needs of education.

[1] Hargreaves, A., et al. (2009). *The Learning Mosaic: A multiple perspectives review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education.

[2] The AISI partnership has resulted in the building of trust, collaboration and teamwork among the following seven education partners who represent diverse interests in providing education for students:

- Alberta Education (AE)
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

To this end, EPSC designed AISI Cycle 5 with an emphasis on three priorities:

- Research Capacity
- Collaborative Cross-School Authority AISI Projects and Networks
- Community Engagement

These three priorities will leverage education transformation through AISI projects while keeping the focus on student engagement, learning and performance and maintaining the grassroots culture.

The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (2009) was one of the primary documents used by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee in developing the framework for Cycle 5. In *The Learning Mosaic*, the researchers indicated the value of creating leadership and support systems related to research and province-wide network architectures that have clear, positive impacts on system-wide outcomes for students. EPSC recognized that provincial support for the three priorities is critical for school authorities to implement successful AISI projects. This support will be established by earmarking some AISI funds for province-wide coordination and leadership in a way that will maximize the benefits of AISI funds for all school authorities.

The *AISI Handbook for Cycle 5 Projects (2012–2015)* has been developed collaboratively by people working on AISI across the province. It has been designed as a reference to provide school authorities with the requirements, guidelines and processes for planning, budgeting, implementing, managing, evaluating, reporting and sharing sustainable AISI projects. It is a guide to support the success of AISI projects and to help ensure that the learning from AISI projects will inform future directions in education.

The handbook includes the goal and principles that form the *Framework for AISI Cycle 5* as well as the characteristics, priorities and requirements for Cycle 5. It also contains three guides to assist school authorities in preparing and submitting project plans and reports:

- *Guide for AISI Project Plans*
- *Guide for AISI Annual Progress Reports*
- *Guide for AISI Project Final Reports*

Appendices include Annual Timelines, References, and Alberta Education Contacts and Resources.

As all of us who work on AISI across the province move forward in Cycle 5, we have the opportunity to share in the excitement and energy that comes with being part of something that is so profoundly impactful!

Acknowledgements

The leadership of the Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) is gratefully acknowledged for guidance in the development of this handbook, which forms the basis for the administration and development of AISI Cycle 5.

The AISI Education Partners consists of the following organizations:

- Alberta Education
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

The AISI partnership has resulted in the building of trust, collaboration and teamwork among the seven education partners who represent diverse interests in providing education for students.

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Framework for AISI Cycle 5[3]

Goal

To improve student learning through initiatives that enhance student engagement and performance and reflect the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority.

Principles

1. AISI projects will focus on student engagement, learning and performance.
2. Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement.
3. AISI reflects the complexity of research, innovation and change processes.
4. The school authority project(s) is/are part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school authority's annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.
5. AISI projects will have a balance of local and provincial measures that include approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures appropriate to the project.
6. AISI project plans will reflect insights from research, literature and related AISI projects.
7. The knowledge generated through AISI will be widely disseminated.
8. Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI will be created and/or enhanced for knowledge dissemination and the exchange of information, ideas and resources.
9. Alberta Education will provide targeted funding to school authorities.

[3] The AISI Partners established the goal, principles and key considerations in 1999. They are included in the *Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (AISI Education Partners Steering Committee, 1999). These have been updated and revised to reflect the evolving nature of AISI in Alberta. The framework and related documents are available on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/aisi.

Priorities for AISI Cycle 5

The following priorities were identified by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) for Cycle 5.

1. Research Capacity

Research and practice are interconnected: research informs practice and practice informs research. The previous cycles of AISI have enabled action-oriented and site-based research in schools across the province. This foundational work needs to be further developed and taken to the next level in order to enable greater innovation, to develop the capacity of teachers as researchers, and to strengthen the learning that can be drawn from AISI projects. Teachers and school authorities will need to continue to engage in research to improve their practice and to create and apply new knowledge to address the changing needs of education.

There will be enhanced opportunities in Cycle 5 for teachers and the school community to:

- build strong connections with universities
- examine current research to inform their AISI projects
- articulate research questions
- gather and analyze relevant data
- analyze findings and derive conclusions
- incorporate findings into their practice
- share findings/lessons with the education community
- read and evaluate published education research findings
- experiment with new strategies/findings from current educational research
- go beyond knowledge sharing to the development of robust models for the transfer of knowledge from the AISI projects

New Requirements for Research:

- Cycle 5 AISI projects will focus on research and improvement.
- There will be a research component for all AISI projects. School authorities will conduct research that focuses on the student learning goal(s) for the project and may also address specific research questions about selected aspects of the project. School authorities will report on their findings as part of their AISI project.
- A minimum expenditure of 10% on research leadership and related support will be required.
- School authorities will submit an AISI Annual Progress Report (AAPR) in place of an AISI Project Annual Report (APAR).

Supports for Research:

- A network to build and support research capacity across the province will be developed, coordinated and resourced.
- EPSC will undertake work on behalf of all projects to address questions of province-wide interest. This will be based on needs identified by AISI projects.
- New technology to support the development and administration of student assessments and surveys and other data collection instruments will be in place for Cycle 5.

2. Collaborative Cross-School Authority AISI Projects and Networks

AISI Cycle 5 represents a move from disconnected or loosely connected projects to a province-wide network of research, improvement and innovation. School authorities will be encouraged to work together to plan, propose and orchestrate shared projects. The renewed emphasis on networks is the EPSC's response to *The Learning Mosaic*'s recommendation in the Summary Report, "to invest in province-wide networks that cut across districts, that reach beyond annual conferences and that incorporate proven design principles of effective network architectures that have clear, positive impacts on system-wide outcomes for students" (p.15).

New Opportunity for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects:

- Two or more school authorities will be able to submit one Collaborative Cross-School Authority Project Plan. These projects will contribute to building lateral capacity by supporting teacher networking and collaboration among schools and across the province, and will enhance knowledge mobilization.

Supports for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects:

- Collaborative cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funding from a newly created funding pool for cross-school authority coordination.
- Provincial coordination will promote and support lateral networks, collaboration and knowledge mobilization.

3. Community Engagement

Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement. Effective school improvement results when principals, teachers, other school staff, students, school councils, parents and other school community members work as a team to establish priorities, set goals for improvement, implement strategies to achieve those goals, and evaluate progress.

In the previous cycles of AISI, there was greater success in an AISI project where formal and informal leaders, teachers, students, parents and the broader community contributed to the project through shared responsibilities (University Research Reviews[4]). These strong partnerships and the trust established in the previous cycles of AISI will form the foundation to strengthen school community engagement.

AISI Cycle 5 will require greater engagement of teachers, students, parents, school community, businesses, universities and other partners during the planning and implementation of research and improvement projects.

New Requirement for Community Engagement:

- All projects will be required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions).

Supports for Community Engagement:

- A rubric has been developed for schools and school authorities to assess the level of community engagement in AISI and to communicate this to stakeholders.
- A virtual learning community will be established to support sharing of best practices for community engagement.

[4] Overall findings from University AISI Research Reviews summarized in AISI Cycle 3 Provincial Report, 2010.

Characteristics of AISI Cycle 5

The following set of descriptions presents the characteristics of AISI as they have developed over the first four cycles and addresses the three priorities for Cycle 5 identified by the Education Partners Steering Committee:

1. Student Focused

   Students are active and engaged learners. AISI projects continue to strengthen the focus on student engagement, learning and performance, and accommodate the diverse learning needs of individual students.

2. Provincial Partnership

   AISI is a provincial partnership among teachers, parents, trustees, superintendents, school business officials, universities and government. The AISI partnership is characterized by trust, collaboration and teamwork among these education partners. The partners share a commitment and a responsibility for improving the education of Alberta students, who are the beneficiaries of this strong and diverse partnership. By working together, the partners continue to develop new relationships, strategies and practices that provide long-term benefits for teaching and learning in Alberta.

3. School Community Engagement

   A school community that is engaged in an AISI project is unified around the clear purpose of improving student engagement, learning and performance, has an inclusive culture that offers a welcoming environment and values diverse membership, and has supportive structures and processes that enable success. Partners in a school community may include administrators, principals, teachers, other school staff, students, school councils, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions.

4. Collaboration

   Collaboration is a critical element for project success. Innovation and effective school improvement result when school community partners work as a team to establish collective priorities, to blend perspectives, expertise and resources, and to share responsibility for student engagement, learning and performance throughout the life of a project and beyond.

5. Catalyst

   AISI is a catalyst for change. The common goal of AISI, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure act in concert to achieve significant change in teaching and learning. AISI projects will leverage educational transformation in Alberta.

6. **Flexibility and Adaptability**
   School authorities, in collaboration with their communities, have the flexibility to design adaptive, innovative AISI projects that enhance student engagement, learning and performance in response to the unique needs and circumstances in the local context.

7. **Culture of Responsiveness and Improvement**
   AISI promotes a culture of responsiveness and improvement that addresses emerging priorities and changing school community contexts. Responsiveness and improvement are shared responsibilities. Schools operating as learning communities actively engage teachers, students, parents and other school community members in learning. Professional learning and ongoing administrative support are critical components in realizing responsiveness and improvement within schools and school authorities.

8. **Research-informed Practice**
   Teachers and school authorities engage in AISI projects to expand their repertoires of best practices and to create and apply new knowledge about powerful learning opportunities for students. As the body of evidence and learning from research on successful practices grow, integration of these practices in new contexts is the challenge and the promise of AISI.

9. **Inquiry and Reflection**
   Inquiry and reflection are dynamic processes that lead to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to teaching and learning. A clear focus on student learning is the foundation for inquiry and reflection.

10. **Building Capacity and Integrating Effective Practices**
    Professional learning continues to ensure that teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices and technologies that are being developed through AISI. Effective professional learning is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. Promising practices, strategies and processes developed or acquired through AISI will benefit Alberta's students in the future.

11. **Shared Leadership**
    AISI is characterized by a complex blend of formal and informal leadership in schools, school authorities and school communities. This blend of leadership empowers participation, ownership and a shared vision of the transformation of education for powerful student learning.

12. Sustainability and Integration

Sustainability involves transference and integration of practices as part of the culture of a school or school authority. AISI projects have a lasting impact on educational practices when what is learned through research and project implementation has been systematically incorporated into schools and school authority practices. There is transferability of effective educational practices to other classrooms and school settings beyond those of project participants.

13. Networks

AISI networks contribute to the exchange of information, ideas and resources as well as communication and knowledge mobilization. Provincial lateral networks cut across school authorities, incorporate proven design principles of effective network architectures, and have clear, positive impacts on authority-wide outcomes for students. Networks include formal and informal interactions, may include face-to-face or digital interactions, and may be local, provincial, national or international.

14. Knowledge Mobilization

The knowledge that AISI contributes to teaching and learning is widely used and applied.

15. Innovation

AISI promotes an environment of innovation in education. Educators are supported in being creative and innovative to make the learning experience powerful for students.

Types of AISI Cycle 5 Projects

In keeping with the priorities for Cycle 5 identified by the Education Partners Steering Committee, two types of AISI projects may be designed, as described in the following table. School authorities may design one or more of each type of project.

Type	Description	Funding
Individual school/school authority	The project is authority-wide or involves a group of schools, a single school, or a single classroom.	Base funding includes funding for a minimum of 10% for research and related leadership and support.
Collaborative cross-school authority	Two or more school authorities work together to design the project.	Base funding includes funding for a minimum of 10% for research and related leadership and support. Additional funding for collaborative cross-school authority coordination may be applied for.

Success Indicators for AISI Cycle 5 Projects

The following indicators of success guide school authorities and the community in the design and implementation of AISI Cycle 5 projects:

- AISI projects provide evidence of improved student engagement, learning and performance.
- AISI projects have elements of innovation.
- AISI contributes to the body of knowledge about improving teaching and learning.
- AISI project results provide examples of promising practices that help to transform teaching and learning.
- Teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices and technologies that are being developed through AISI.
- Knowledge is shared widely through conferences, reports, the AISI website, and provincial networking sessions.
- Established AISI networks contribute to the exchange of information, ideas and resources, as well as to communication, knowledge dissemination and knowledge mobilization.
- AISI contributes to research that informs policy and practice.

Project-specific success indicators will be developed by school authorities, as appropriate.

Requirements for AISI Cycle 5 Projects

The following table lists the basic requirements for all AISI projects. The online AISI Project Plans, Annual Progress Reports and Final Reports that are submitted to Alberta Education are comprised of these requirements.

Basic Requirement	Details
1. Project Design	• Brief Description/Introduction • Statement of Student Learning Goal(s) • Research Question(s) • Literature Review • Methodology • Significance/Contribution to Knowledge • Scope/Limitations

2. Project Strategies and Implementation Plans	• Student Learning Goal(s), Current Situation, Measures and Relevant Evidence
	• Strategies to address student engagement, learning and performance goals, including activities and timelines
	• Implementation Plans
	  ○ School Community Engagement Plan
	  ○ Professional Learning Plan
	  ○ Data Collection and Analysis Plan
	  ○ Knowledge Mobilization Plan
	• Staffing Requirements

3. Project Budget	AISI Base Funding: • Minimum of 15% for Professional Learning • Minimum of 10% for Research and Related Leadership and Support • Maximum of 5% for Project Administration/Coordination • Maximum of 10% for Equipment Further Funding: • Application for additional funding for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Project Coordination
4. Annual Progress Reports	• Preliminary Research Results/Findings • Progress Towards Student Learning Goal(s) • Key Learning • Future Actions/Directions • Evidence of School Community Engagement • Financial Report and Proposed Budget for Next Year
5. Final Report	• Final Results/Findings and Discussion • Evaluation of Achievement of Student Learning Goal(s) • Key Learnings, Conclusions and Recommendations • Financial Report

Guide for AISI Cycle 5 Project Plans

The purpose of this guide is to support the process of project planning and the completion of the AISI online project plan. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the online project plan. The guide contains the following sections:

Section A: Project Type
Section B: Project Parameters
Section C: Project Design
Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans
Section E: Project Budget
Section F: Certification and Submission

Section A: Project Type

Innovative AISI Projects

AISI provides targeted funds to try new things. School authorities are encouraged to try new approaches to address local student needs. Innovation is defined broadly to include research-based strategies that have not been used before in the school authority or its schools. Innovative AISI projects may:

- focus on themes that are brand new to a school authority
- go into greater depth on previous themes with new directions, research, questions, strategies and measures

Individual School Authority Projects

School authorities may choose to develop their own AISI project(s) or work collaboratively with other school authorities to develop and implement a joint project. Individual school authority projects may include:

- all schools in a school authority
- a selected group of schools
- one school
- selected grades/classes within a school
- combinations of any of the above

Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects

Collaborative cross-school authority projects is one of the three priorities for AISI Cycle 5. Collaborative cross-school authority projects in Cycle 5 will further build networks and enhance lateral capacity-building and knowledge mobilization. *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* recommended "target(ing) funding allocations within the overall AISI budget for cross-district collaborative projects" (p. 117), and strengthening AISI networks across school authorities for the further development and continued success of AISI. Extending and deepening collaboration and partnership, according to *The Learning Mosaic*, can be achieved in four ways

- widening the range of collaborative partnerships
- forging stronger connections and networks among schools across districts
- giving collaborative work a more explicitly critical edge
- instigating collaborative relationships of support and assistance between sites (p. 115)

School authorities are encouraged to participate in cross-school authority projects, but is a matter of choice rather than a requirement for AISI Cycle 5.

Additional Funding

Cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funding for project coordination, over and above AISI funds allocated to each of the participating school authorities.

Criteria for Additional Funding

To be eligible for additional funding for coordination, a cross-school authority project must have the following:

- a completed and submitted project budget
- a rationale for additional coordination funds

Funding decisions will be based on:

- anticipated project impacts on student learning
- available funds in the cross-school authority funding pool
- context of participating school authorities (e.g., geographic factors)
- project budget
- project design
- evidence of school community engagement
- knowledge mobilization strategies
- anticipated benefits to participating school authorities
- anticipated benefits to other school authorities and other education stakeholders

Agreement Form

Participating school authorities will complete an agreement form that includes the following:

- name of host school authority
- names of participating school authorities
- description of leadership/governance structure and coordination of the project
- amount of AISI funds to be contributed by each collaborating school authority

Project Submission

Cross-school authority project proposals will include:

- a consolidated project budget or separate budgets for each of the participating school authorities
- a copy of the agreement form signed by the superintendents. This agreement will be submitted as an attachment to the project proposal.

Section B: Project Parameters

This section of the plan provides information about the following details of the project: project ID, title, school authorities involved, schools involved, duration of project, grades and numbers of students, and contact information. As well, further information is provided in the brief description.

Completion of most requirements in this section is straightforward and requires little guidance. The tips below address four of them.

Tips

- *Title*: Keep the title short, but related directly to the anticipated improvements for the selected students.
- *Duration of Project*: Projects usually extend over three years, but projects that extend over one or two years may also be designed.
- *Schools Involved*: Individual school/school authority projects may be district-wide, single-school, or involve a select group of schools. Collaborative cross-school authority projects may involve all schools or selected schools from participating school authorities.
- *Grades and Number of Students*: Estimate the number of students at each grade who will be involved in the project over its duration. If the number varies significantly after the project is approved, revisions can be made.

Brief Description

This part of the plan provides a brief outline of the AISI project. The information will be used to provide the project description in public documents.

Information includes the following aspects of the project:

- background or context for the project
- purpose
- scope
- student learning goal(s)

Tips

– Try to keep the summary brief, but, at the same time, provide sufficient information for others to understand what the project is about. Clarity is key.

Research Leadership

This part of the plan provides a description of how the school authority will address research leadership. Research leadership resides and is developed in each school authority. As their research capacity continues to grow, teachers will become more versatile action researchers in their own classrooms and also have a more active role in the collection, analysis and interpretation of information for the AISI project. Research capacity can be developed in collaboration with internal research expertise, university connections (faculty/graduate students), shared expertise with another school authority, other research institution/agency/organization, or contracted researcher. The AISI Cycle 5 provincial network is a source of collaboration and sharing.

Contact Information

The AISI Coordinator will be the main contact for the School Research and Improvement Branch in the review of project plan(s), progress report(s) and final report(s). Provision is made in the online project plan for identifying other project contacts that can provide additional information about the project and participate in networks. All contacts listed here will be added to the email communication list at the School Research and Improvement Branch, Alberta Education.

Section C: Project Design

AISI Cycle 5 projects focus on research and improvement. The key elements of a project design are a statement of the student learning goal(s), research question(s), literature review, methodology, significance, scope and limitations. A well-planned project design increases the validity of the information that is collected and analyzed. This will allow project teams to more confidently and clearly describe the impact of the project on student engagement, learning and performance. An appropriate methodology allows for effective use of the information gathered during a project. As well, project teams will be able to share their results more readily with others who wish to study the results further or to mobilize the knowledge in their own context.

Statement of Student Learning Goal(s)

The student learning goal(s) describes the improvements in student engagement, learning and performance that are anticipated as a result of the project. The school authority's three-year planning will be helpful to inform the development of the AISI project statement of the student learning goal(s). Although various aspects of the project, such as school climate, staff capacity and parental engagement, are important supports for the attainment of the student learning goal(s), they are not stated as goals in the project plan. Only the student learning goal(s) is to be included here. The measures, success indicators and strategies selected and designed for the project will align with these goals.

Principle 1:
AISI projects will focus on student engagement, learning and performance.

Principle 4:
The school authority project(s) is/are part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school authority's annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.

Tips

- A helpful way to structure a goal statement is to begin with "To".
- Indicate in the goal statement those students who will be selected (e.g., "To increase student engagement and achievement in Mathematics, Grades 1-9").

The student learning goal(s) will be entered in the first column of the table in the online project plan (see Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans).

Research Question(s)

All AISI projects must identify and address one or more research questions that are the focus of the project. The research question(s) must be directly related to the impact the new instructional strategies will have on student engagement, learning or performance and be strongly linked to the student learning goal(s) for the project. Project reports will address the findings of the research conducted during the project relative to the research question(s).

Principle 3:
AISI reflects the complexity of research, innovation and change processes.

A research question is a formal statement about a phenomenon to be studied. It can, in fact, be either a question or a hypothesis. The question or hypothesis accurately and clearly defines what the research will attempt to confirm or discover. It creates the point of departure for a project, which will progress from what is known or believed to be true, as determined by the literature review and environmental scan, to what is hoped to be learned through investigation.

Depending on the scope of the project, school authorities may choose to have an overarching research question as well as several research sub-questions that are more specific in focus.

Tips

- Use the following structure to formulate your research question:
  To what extent (or to what degree) does (the action or strategies the school/school authority is planning to implement) impact (or influence) student engagement, learning and performance for (the population of selected students)?
- Be sure that the research question(s) is linked with the student learning goal(s) of the project.

Literature Review

This section of the AISI Project Plan will provide a brief account of what has been published by scholars and reported in AISI projects relative to the area of inquiry. The purpose of the literature review is twofold: first, to acknowledge and build upon the knowledge base related to a topic and second, to enhance researchers' knowledge about the topic. A well-crafted literature review will ensure the research improves and enhances "the wheel" rather than reinvents it.

Principle 6:
AISI project plans will reflect insights from research, literature and related AISI projects.

The literature review should:

- be related directly to the research question(s)
- synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
- include an explanation of how the literature will influence the AISI project

Tips

- Include references to other AISI projects that are relevant and helpful in planning the project. Projects may be readily searched by keywords and themes on the AISI website, at AISI project search tools.
- Access thematic pages, also posted on the AISI website, where there are links to web-based resources on a variety of themes.
- Determine an appropriate length for the review based on the theme and what is found. Generally three to five pages will be sufficient.
- Work with colleagues in other school authorities who have themes of common interest in the development of the literature review.

Methodology

Methodology[5] is how data are gathered and analyzed and how conclusions that answer the research question(s) are drawn. The type of methodology to be used is determined by the nature of the research question(s).

The description of the methodology to be used should be sufficiently detailed for another school authority to use it to apply the study in another setting.

As part of the AISI project methodology, the project team may also choose to spotlight an aspect of the project, such as the relationship of a specified instructional strategy with the performance of certain students, or the impact of community engagement on student learning. This spotlight might focus on all selected students or on a smaller group and might extend over the cycle of the project or over a shorter time. The focus of this spotlight could be a separate research question or a sub-question under the broader research question.

Tips

- Establish the research question(s) first and then select the methodology that best fits.
- Describe the population or kind of sampling procedure that will be used (e.g., random sample, volunteer sample, stratified sample).
- Describe the kind of measurement instruments that will be used.
- Describe the techniques and tools that will be used to analyze and present project findings.

[5] Supporting information and resources related to research may be accessed on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/project-management.aspx

Significance

An explanation of the significance of the research describes its importance in the local context, its relevance in Alberta, and its place in educational research.

Tips

- Write a few sentences to explain why the project is important and of benefit to the engagement, learning and/or performance of the selected students.
- Describe how this project may contribute to the advancement of teaching and learning in Alberta.
- Think about the potential utility of the project after it is completed. A strong project should pass the "So?" test. (E.g., What difference will it make for students? How will the research inform project implementation?)

Scope and Limitations

Scope defines the range of the project and specifically what it addresses (e.g., grades, ages, student groups, and student competencies).

Limitations refers to what is beyond the scope of the project. It addresses what the project cannot do as well as the limits of what will be learned in terms of its transferability to other contexts.

Tips

- When defining the scope, briefly restate the purpose of the project and who are the selected students. State who is working in the project and what areas are being addressed.
- Keep in mind that all projects have limits.

Other Aspects

Other aspects of the project design include ethics and an environmental scan. Although these aspects are not included in the online project plan(s), they should be part of the school authority's design process.

Ethics

Any work and processes involving people should to adhere to ethical principles and practices that respect the dignity and preserve the well-being of all people involved. Ethical considerations include:

- no harming of any person involved (students, parents, staff, community)
- subject's right to privacy

Ensure that the project complies with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP) and the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), as applicable.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan is a compilation of information about events, trends and relationships that will influence the student learning goal(s) and design of the project. It extends beyond the school authority, drawing relevant information from sources such as government initiatives and other AISI projects. It also looks within the school authority, drawing from sources such as focus groups, interviews, needs assessments, surveys, and student data. School community engagement processes may inform and be informed by the environmental scan.

Tips

- Be sure to include information about student learning needs. This is essential for developing the student learning goal(s).
- Use the environmental scan and literature review to develop the student learning goal(s) and the overall project design.

Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans

This section of the online project plan addresses how improvements will be achieved – that is, the strategies and implementation plans that are expected to bring about improvements in student engagement, learning and performance.

Student Learning Goal(s)

In Section C: Project Design, a statement of the student learning goal(s) was indicated. This goal statement described the improvements in student engagement, learning and performance that are anticipated as a result of the project.

Tips

- Enter this statement of the student learning goal(s) in the first column of the table in the online project plan.

Current Situation

The current situation is a narrative description and/or numeric value, based on qualitative and/or quantitative data. A clear and accurate account of the current situation is foundational to many other aspects of a project's design. It allows appropriate success indicators to be set and makes it easier to determine the impact of the project.

Tips

- Include information about the data sources and the timeframe.
- Describe a group of students that is comparable to the group identified in the student learning goal(s).
- Use the present tense in describing the current situation.

Measures

The purpose of measurement is to provide evidence of the impact on student engagement, learning and performance. Therefore, the measures must be appropriately aligned with the anticipated improvements described in the student learning goal(s).

As appropriate to the study, project plans should include a balance of local and provincial measures. There is no recommended percentage for this balance in AISI Cycle 5 projects. The use of readily available provincial measures is encouraged, where appropriate and reasonable. There should also be a balance, where appropriate, of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Principle 5:
AISI projects will have a balance of local and provincial measures that include approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures appropriate to the project.

Qualitative measures provide rich, transferable descriptions of individuals' experience of educational phenomena, with a focus on process, meaning and human behaviours as they occur in context. Sources of evidence might include: interview transcripts, written reports (e.g., observation field notes), focus group transcripts, video or audio recordings (e.g., recordings of classroom activities), artifacts, documents and portfolios (e.g., personal and professional journals and artwork), and analysis of comments on surveys.

Quantitative measures use numeric data. Sources of evidence might include standardized tests, local assessments (e.g., teacher marks and school authority-wide assessments), school records (e.g., attendance, student behaviour, credits and course completion), provincial achievement tests, diploma examinations, participation rates, high school completion rates, drop-out rates, Rutherford Scholarship eligibility, transition rates, local surveys and provincial surveys.

Since each AISI project reflects the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority, there is no minimum or maximum number of measures. The number of measures should be sufficient to demonstrate "evidence of success" in terms of progress and final outcomes.

Tips

- Avoid allowing the measurement instruments to "drive" the project design. That is, establish the student learning goal(s) first and then select or develop the measures that will help determine how well the goal(s) is attained.
- Use a variety of measures to inform the research question(s).

Relevant Evidence

In the spirit of backward design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005), it is strongly recommended that evidence indicating the success of the student learning goal(s) is identified before plans for instructional strategies and professional learning are considered. In this way, the student learning goal(s) is "operationalized" by answering the question "What would we accept as evidence that the student learning goal(s) has been achieved?"

The following table provides examples of relevant evidence for qualitative and quantitative measures that a project team might set based on different current situations:

Example 1

Current Situation	**Relative Evidence for Quantitative Measures**
Over the past three years, high school completion results have indicated that an average of only 74.8% of our students graduate three years after beginning high school.	High school completion results will indicate that 80% of students entering Grade 10 in 2012 will graduate in three years. School records of selected students' attendance will indicate that student attendance has increased by 5%.

Example 2

Current Situation	**Relevant Evidence for Qualitative Measures**
Evidence from anecdotal comments on student and teacher surveys over the past several years has indicated that students are passive learners who feel that schooling is done to them.	Data collected through transcripts of student focus groups will indicate that students are satisfied with opportunities to be involved in their own assessment. Samples of student self-reflections will indicate growth in students' ability to set goals and self-assess.

Tips

- For quantitative measures, set targets that are reasonable and attainable, based on prior performance.
- For qualitative measures, write a description of what it would look like if success has been attained for the student learning goal(s).
- Indicate how the relevant evidence will be measured and reported upon, including timelines, where appropriate.

Instructional Strategies to Achieve the Student Learning Goal(s)

This part of the project plan describes the new instructional strategies that will be developed and/or identified to help attain the student learning goal(s) identified in the project.

Instructional strategies, and the plans for implementing them, may change during the course of the project, based on various factors, such as the changing needs of students, professional reflection, the introduction of additional strategies, and the analysis of project data.

Tips

- Describe the strategies sufficiently to be easily understood by readers.
- Focus on what will happen for students rather than on professional learning.
- Include timelines for each strategy, as appropriate.

School Community Engagement Plan

School community engagement is one of the three priorities for Cycle 5. *The Learning Mosaic* identified the following important area for growth: "increased parent and community engagement in the focus of AISI projects and throughout the whole AISI process" (p. 6).

Principle 2:
Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement.

AISI Cycle 5 projects must include plans for how the community will be engaged throughout the life of the project, as it is developed, implemented, evaluated and celebrated. The school community includes teachers, administrators, other school staff, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions. "All projects will be required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders…" (p. 3 of the Handbook).

An engaged community consists of many different people and organizations who are involved in different ways, to different degrees, at different times, and in different contexts. In an engaged community, some members may be involved by staying informed or by informing others, while others may be participating in activities at a school. Some members may be part of a steering committee, while others may be represented by members of that committee. Some members may seldom come to a school, but actively support student engagement, learning and performance in other ways. Some members who were not involved in the planning stage of the project may be heavily involved during the implementation. Thus, a project is most effectively supported not only by the diversity of people and organizations that are involved, but also by the diverse ways in which they are involved, in terms of how, when, where and why.

There are two main groups of people who need to be engaged, in various ways, in the planning, implementing, evaluating, and celebrating of AISI projects:

- those who will implement the project including teachers, administrators, students, and parents
- those providing representation for key partner groups, including school councils, ATA local, student councils, and elected school officials

In addition, individuals and representatives from the broader community may engage in a variety of ways to contribute to AISI project success.

Even though different people are involved in different ways, it is essential to an AISI project's success that the people who are at the core of the project — teachers, administrators, students, and parents — are actively involved in all aspects of the project throughout its cycle. Others in the school community provide support for the project by:

- supporting those at the core of the project
- supporting students' learning in school and in the community
- being knowledgeable about and advocating for the project
- celebrating project successes that result in improved student engagement, learning and performance

Community engagement thrives when the conditions are right. In an AISI project, these conditions are:

- a *clear purpose* of improving student engagement, learning and performance
- an *inclusive culture* that values diverse membership
- *supportive structures and processes* that enable engagement

These conditions are established in the planning stages of the project and are deliberately strengthened throughout a project to allow engagement to develop and thrive.

As a school community becomes more engaged in an AISI project, members see growth in the following aspects of their shared experience:

- *diversity* of the community involved in the project
- *opportunity the* community has to be involved in the project
- *understanding* the community has of the project
- *support* the community provides for those implementing the project and for students' learning in and out of school
- *ownership* the community has for the project's progress
- *celebration* by the community of the project's successes

A *School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum*[6] has been developed to help school authorities reflect on the levels of community engagement in their AISI project. The rubric may help school authorities to:

- describe community engagement in the local context
- establish expectations for community engagement
- determine how to help community engagement improve
- communicate with stakeholders about engagement

The process for determining the profile of school community engagement in an AISI project is one of informed and collaborative judgement. The rubric and continuum provide a framework for school authorities to make this judgement, but are not measurement instruments. The evidence on which the judgements are made may be assembled from various measures, such as surveys, meeting minutes, discussion notes and anecdotal notes.

AISI Project Plans are required to include a School Community Engagement Plan. This plan will show how the community will be actively and meaningfully engaged throughout the life of the project, and will be reported on annually.

- Consider questions such as the following: Who will be consulted? How will decisions be made? How will responsibilities be shared? How will school community members be involved in project evaluation? How will successes be shared and celebrated?
- Describe the strategies that will engage various stakeholders in project implementation. Include timelines where appropriate.
- Describe how teachers and other staff members will be engaged in project planning, implementation, evaluation, and celebration.
- Consider how parents and other school community members will support students' engagement, learning and performance.
- Consider communication strategies and organizational structures to support community engagement.

[6] The School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum is available on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/project-management.aspx

Professional Learning Plan

A comprehensive professional learning plan in support of project implementation is an important part of the AISI Project Plan. In *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (2010), teachers' professional growth is identified as an essential condition for successful implementation. The accomplishment of an educational change is dependant upon "coordinated, collaborative and comprehensive professional learning plans" (p. 7).

Findings from AISI have shown that effective professional learning is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. Examples include teacher mentorship, instructional coaching, and professional learning communitites. For more information about planning professional learning, see *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (2005).

Professional learning is expected to account for a minimum of 15% of the project budget. Expenses may include resources, materials, external consultants, teacher release costs, travel, accommodation, facilities, and other costs related to professional learning activities.

Tips

- Describe the professional learning opportunities that will be developed, indicate who will be involved, and provide a timeline for anticipated events.
- Describe how professional learning will be integrated into instructional strategies.
- Describe strategies, procedures or processes that will help to develop commitment to the project.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

The Learning Mosaic identified the following issue related to data collection in AISI projects:

> "The data base consists of data aggregated to the level of average scores on individual measures within each project. The raw data from which these aggregates have been developed consist of achievement scores for individual students and attitude/satisfaction scores for students, teachers and parents. However, the individual scores are not recorded in the data base. Much of the variation in individual scores is lost in the aggregation. "This precludes the use of techniques such as multilevel analysis, which can separate within-project variation from between project variation" (p. 30).

As a result, the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee has recommended that Cycle 5 project plans include plans for data collection at the individual student level[7]. Retaining data at the individual student level throughout a project will strengthen the validity of the research and allow for varied and detailed analysis. For example, it will allow school authorities to analyze results only for selected students rather than analyze aggregated totals that may include students who were not involved in the project.

Resources and timelines should be put in place for the collection and analysis of data, including a description of who will be involved, a summary of what instruments will be used, and a description of how data will be aggregated, disaggregated, and analyzed. Ongoing collection and reflection on progress toward project goals will allow school authorities to:

- identify preliminary research findings
- recognize and respond to participant needs
- build on innovative strategies and practices
- determine future actions

The AISI networks established in Cycle 5 are integral to the collaboration across the province to strengthen data collection and analysis. These networks are a means of support and provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue for school authorities.

Tips

– Determine the disaggregation of data that will be most useful, such as by gender, age, mobility, duration of participation, ESL, and learning needs.

Knowledge Mobilization Plan

School authorities are required to create a knowledge mobilization plan that identifies strategies for dissemination and anticipated application of key learnings from AISI projects.

Principle 7:
The knowledge generated through AISI will be widely disseminated.

[7] Results cannot be released on an individual student basis. Release must be in compliance with The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP), and the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).

Project teams and AISI partners will share responsibility for knowledge dissemination through networks and other means. Potential audiences include school community members and people and organizations beyond the school authority, such as education researchers. Ways to disseminate research findings and key findings from an AISI project include:

- school/school authority newsletters
- school/school authority websites
- displays (e.g., school bulletin boards, community boards)
- publications (e.g., fact sheets, brochures, videos)
- presentations (e.g., AISI Conferences, workshops, board meetings)
- events (e.g., open houses, celebrations)
- media releases
- articles (e.g., *The School Research and Improvement SCOOP*, the *ATA News*)
- Promising Practices for the AISI website
- scholarly journals (e.g., *AISI Journal*)

Principle 8:
Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI will be created and/or enhanced for knowledge dissemination and the exchange of information, ideas and resources.

Tips

– Ensure that AISI project(s) are acknowledged at events and in publications.

Moving from knowledge dissemination to knowledge mobilization means going beyond sharing findings to putting them into action. School authorities are encouraged to create robust models to support this mobilization and to include activities and timelines in the Knowledge Mobilization Plan.

Supporting knowledge mobilization means bringing people together to move from only sharing and discussing what they are learning toward exploring the implications for their work in school improvement. Strategies include:

- networks (local, national, international) to exchange or develop information, ideas and resources
- communities of practice to incorporate and build upon findings and key learnings from AISI projects
- events (e.g., workshops, symposia) to discuss what has been learned from AISI projects and to explore connections and implications for future actions and directions

Tips

– Describe how students, teachers, parents, elected officials, other school community members and wider audiences will be made aware of project findings. Include timelines, where appropriate.

– Describe the anticipated events that will bring together educators and education partners to discuss what has been learned from AISI projects and to explore the connections and implications for future school improvement. Include timelines, where appropriate.

Staffing Requirements

This part of the plan identifies the people whose formally identified roles in the project are paid for through the AISI budget. This may include AISI coordinators, coaches, lead teachers, researchers, other professionals, teaching assistants, and administrative support staff.

Tips

- Enter how much of a full-time equivalent (FTE) will be funded by the AISI budget for each staff member (e.g., AISI Coordinator 0.8 FTE).
- Describe the key activities for each staff member and provide an estimate of the percentage of his or her AISI time that these activities will take.
- Use the job titles rather than the names of staff members.

Section E: Project Budget

AISI Coordinators and Secretary-Treasurers/Chief Financial Officers should work collaboratively to ensure alignment, consistency and accuracy of the AISI budget within the school authority budget.

AISI Funding Requested

AISI funding is available to all Alberta school authorities (public, separate, francophone, charter and private schools) and includes the two Lloydminster School Divisions (Alberta Regulation 51/97).

Principle 9:
Alberta Education will provide targeted funding to school authorities.

A school authority may submit one or more individual projects and/or one or more collaborative cross-school authority projects. However, the total funding requested cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement.

The funding entitlement to a school authority for a school year is based upon the previous year's September 30th registered student count (ECS students counted as 0.5 FTE) times the per-student rate. The annual per-student rate is determined by dividing the total available funding for the year by the total "eligible" provincial enrolment count. (Consult the *Funding Manual* for current rates.)

Funding flows to school authorities beginning in September of the first year of the cycle and is based upon submission of an AISI Project Plan and subsequent project approval by the School Research and Improvement Branch of Alberta Education. For subsequent years, funding flows upon submission and approval of the AISI Annual Progress Report.

Funding from Other Sources

A school authority can combine the AISI funds with funding from other sources (internal or external) in order to implement larger or more comprehensive projects. Funding from other sources should be specified in the project plan.

Transfers from Other Projects

With approval from the School Research and Improvement Branch, school authorities may phase out projects and submit new plans or redirect funds to existing projects.

Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects

Collaborative cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funds for project coordination. This funding will be over and above AISI funds allocated to each of the participating school authorities.

AISI Project Expenses

The method of allocating AISI funds within a school authority is a local decision based on local needs and circumstances. However, there are four areas with minimum and/or maximum expense requirements.

1) ***Professional Learning***
   Professional learning will account for a minimum of 15% of an AISI project budget. Costs for professional learning include salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for leading or delivering professional learning activities. Other costs associated with professional learning are broken into four types of expenses:
   - (substitute) costs to release teachers for professional learning activities
   - materials/resources used in professional learning activities
   - travel/accommodation/meal costs incurred at professional learning activities
   - fees for external experts or registration fees for professional learning activities

2) ***Research Capacity***
   Research capacity is one of the three priorities for Cycle 5. In order to enable greater innovation, to develop the capacity of teachers as researchers, and to strengthen the learning that can be drawn from AISI projects, research and related leadership and support will account for at least 10% of an AISI project budget. This may include:
   - salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for research

- contracts with external researchers (fee for services, office supplies, travel expenses, and other business costs incurred by the researcher)
- costs associated with the literature review, research methods and data collection and analysis

3) Project Management

Project management and administration will account for a maximum of 5% of an AISI project budget. Costs for project management include salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for project management. Other costs for project management may include:

- office supplies
- travel/accommodation/meals associated with project management duties
- business expenses related to project management

4) Equipment and Other Capital

Equipment and/or other capital costs will account for a maximum of 10% of an AISI project budget. Equipment may include computers, interactive whiteboards and other items, as long as their purchase is appropriate to the AISI project.

Section F: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Project Plan is accurate, reliable, valid and complete.

Requirements for certification:

- The AISI Project is research-based
- Information provided in the AISI Project Plan is accurate, reliable, valid and complete
- There is meaningful engagement and support of key partner representatives, including school councils, ATA local, student councils, and elected school officials.
- There are processes in place for ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- Budget is accurate and complete
- FOIP/PIPA compliance regarding names in the proposal and/or attachments
- Documentations and records are being kept to support what is reported in the Project Proposal and Annual Progress Reports

The target date for submission of AISI Cycle 5 Project Plans to the School Research and Improvement Branch is April 30.

Guide for AISI Annual Progress Reports (AAPR)

At the end of each year, school authorities are required to submit an AISI Annual Progress Report (AAPR) to the School Research and Improvement Branch. The target date for submission of progress reports is October 15th.

The purpose of this guide is to support the process of completing the online AAPR. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the report. The guide contains the following sections:

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress toward the Student Learning Goal(s)
Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement
Section III: Financial Report
Section IV: Certification and Submission

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress Toward the Student Learning Goal(s)

Results and Discussion

In Cycle 5, progress reports are expected to provide reflections on preliminary research findings and on progress toward achieving the student learning goal(s). *Results Tables* are included in the reporting template for school authorities to track interim data for measures related to the student learning goal(s). Project leaders are encouraged to update this section regularly throughout the life of the project[8].

The preliminary research data may indicate a trend toward achieving desired results, or they may not. Either way, it is important to document the results and interpret what may be having an impact on student engagement, learning and/or performance. Even if results are inconclusive, there will be something of value to discuss.

Tips

- Consider what formats will represent data in the most meaningful way (e.g., tables, figures and graphs).
- Use the text field in the online report to summarize key results and to clarify points, as needed.
- Describe links or correlations that may be apparent in the data. For example, if the evidence collected indicates that an instructional strategy has been effective with a particular group of students, discuss this here. Explain why this may be happening.

[8] It is expected that results collected and reported in the *Results Tables* will reflect what was stated in the Data Collection and Analysis Plan that is part of the AISI Project Plan.

- Discuss both the findings related to the research questions and the progress toward the student learning goal(s).
- Disaggregation of data is very helpful in the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Key Learnings to Date

The purpose of this part of the report is to describe what is working well and what is not working well in the project. Discussion may include instructional strategies, professional learning, data collection, and school community engagement.

Tips

- Highlight any effective practices that are making a difference for student engagement, learning or performance and that might be shared with other people.
- Organize the information around the research question(s).

Future Actions/Directions

Adjustments or modifications that will be made in the project are outlined here. These changes may be related to instructional strategies, models for professional learning, strategies for engaging the community, strategies for data collection and analysis, or to any other aspect of the project that will have an impact on student engagement, learning or performance. If the research component of the project has identified effective practices, school authorities will likely want to apply this practice on a larger scale.

Tips

- The actions described here will flow naturally from the key learnings achieved since the implementation of the project.

Attachments

School authorities are encouraged to attach other documents that may provide further information related to the project. This may include information related to additional research studies within the project.

Tips

- Formats may include Word, PDF, and Excel.
- Links to videos or other artifacts housed on the school authority website may also be included as attachments.

Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement

AISI projects are required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions). School authorities will use this section of the AISI Annual Progress Report to describe activities that have engaged members of the school community.

Tips

- Use the School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum to help reflect on the ways in which the community has been engaged.
- Consider ways to demonstrate evidence of the support of key stakeholders (e.g., surveys of perceived engagement).

Section III: Financial Report

School authorities report actual funding and expenses in this section of the AISI Annual Progress Report. Also required in this section is a proposed budget that includes projected funding and expenses for the following year.

Tips

- Ensure that projected expenses align with funding requirements outlined in the AISI Project Plan.

Section IV: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Annual Progress Report is accurate, reliable, valid and complete.

The target date for submission of AISI Annual Progress Reports (AAPR) is October 15th in each of the first two years of the project.

Guide for AISI Project Final Reports (APFR)

At the end of the final year of an AISI project, school authorities are required to submit an AISI Project Final Report (APFR) for each project, to the School Research and Improvement Branch.

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate the process of completing the online APFR. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the report. The guide contains the following sections:

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress toward the Student Learning Goal(s)
Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement
Section III: Financial Report
Section IV: Certification and Submission

Section I: Final Research Findings and Discussion

Results

The purposes of this section are to present the results of the research and to report the final results on student measures for engagement, learning and performance.

The research results should include a summary description of the data collected relative to the research question(s).

Tips

- Provide data that is relevant to the research question(s) and the student learning goal(s).
- Include any unanticipated results that may have been identified. These can be valuable to the project and to others interested in the impact of the project.
- Identify what did not work as anticipated. This is valuable information to share and learn from.

Final data collected from quantitative and/or qualitative measures are entered in the *Results Tables*. Interim results that were collected throughout the project will provide additional information and should be included in the tables, as appropriate.

Tips

- Ensure that the type of results collected and reported in the *Results Tables* correspond to the Data Collection and Analysis Plan in the project plan.

Discussion and Interpretation of Results

The interpretation of findings is a critical part of research. This is the process of explaining any links and correlations apparent in the data. For example, if the evidence collected indicates that an instructional strategy has been effective with a particular group of students, a discussion about why this may have happened should be included here.

The collection of student-level data makes flexible aggregation, disaggregation, and varied analysis possible (e.g., by gender, age, mobility, duration of participation, ESL, and FNMI), thereby allowing for meaningful interpretation of results.

Tips

- Provide a brief overview of how data were aggregated, disaggregated, and analyzed.
- Describe what has been learned from the results.
- Use tables, figures and graphs to illustrate links and correlations apparent in the data. Clarify the results in tables, figures and graphics with additional text.

Evaluation of the Achievement of the Student Learning Goal(s)

Since the achievement of the student learning goal(s) is at the heart of the project, an evaluation of the impact the project has had on student engagement, learning and performance is the most important part of the final report. This evaluation must be substantiated by the data entered in the *Results Tables*.

Tips

- Consider what has changed in the classroom. How has student engagement, learning and performance been impacted? Focus on what changed, rather than on why it has changed. The next part of this section provides for an explanation of why the results were achieved.
- Close the section with a statement about the overall impact on student engagement, learning and performance.
- Avoid discussion here of other aspects of the project, such as professional learning or community engagement, and focus only on changes in student engagement, learning and performance.

Key Learnings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The research question was the point of departure for the AISI project. The information provided in this part of the AISI Project Final Report is the point of closure.

It is important to place the findings in the context of the research identified in the literature review. The intent of the conclusions and recommendations is to contribute to the body of knowledge about teaching and learning. The results of the project may confirm what is already known, add to something that is already known, or may uncover something new.

The project team will identify the overarching big ideas that have come out of the project. Having already discussed and evaluated results in earlier parts of the report, in this section the team will highlight the effective project strategies. These are practices that the research findings have shown to have made a difference for students and that will be shared with others, such as new approaches to professional learning and innovative strategies to meaningfully engage the school community.

This part of the report may also include discussion about what did not work well in the project. Reflections about strategies that did not work will provide valuable information for others interested in similar work.

In addition to identifying the key learnings that have arisen from the project, the project team will use this part of the report to make recommendations for further study. Recommendations may identify questions that another researcher or school authority can expand upon for their own research project. The section may also include suggestions or advice to others wishing to embark on a similar project or study.

The conclusions and recommendations section will contribute to the body of knowledge about teaching and learning. The results of the project may confirm what is already known, add to something that is already known, or may uncover something new.

Tips

- Describe what was powerful in the project.
- Describe how the research findings tie into the body of research highlighted in the literature review.

Attachments

School authorities are encouraged to attach other documents that may provide further information related to the project. This may include information related to additional research studies within the project.

Tips

- Formats may include Word, PDF, and Excel documents.
- Links to videos or other artifacts housed on the school authority website may also be included as attachments.

Section II: Financial Report

Full Account of AISI Funding with Actual Expenses

School authorities are expected to report actual funding and expenses in this section of the AISI Project Final Report. It is an expectation that the AISI funding entitlement received by a school authority be expended by the end of the project.

Section III: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Project Final Report is accurate, reliable, valid, and complete.

The target date for submission of the AISI Project Final Report (APFR) is October 15th of the final year of the project.

Appendix 1

Annual Timelines

Alberta Education	School Authority	Date
Ministerial announcement confirming Cycle 5 funding		September 21, 2011
Framework for Cycle 5 available for school authorities		October 25, 2011
Handbook for AISI Cycle 5 projects available for school authorities		December 2011
Support for school authorities in project development	Project planning and development	December 2011 – April 2012
Budget announcement for AISI Cycle 5 funding		February 2012 (anticipated)
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 1 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2012
	Target date for submission of AISI Project Plans	April 30, 2012
Review and approval of project plans		May 2012 – September 2012
Year 1		
Funding payments to school authorities for approved projects	Project implementation	September 2012 – August 2013
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 2 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2013
	AISI Annual Progress Reports target date	October 15, 2013
Review and approval of AISI Annual Progress Reports		October 15, 2013 – December 31, 2013

Alberta Education	School Authority	Date
Year 2		
Funding payments to school authorities upon approval of AISI Annual Progress Report	Project implementation	September 2013 – August 2014
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 3 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2014
	AISI Annual Progress Reports target date	October 15, 2014
Review and approval of AISI Annual Progress Reports		October 15, 2014 – December 31, 2014
Year 3		
Funding payments to school authorities upon approval of AISI Annual Progress Report	Project implementation Project evaluation	September 2014 – August 2015
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
	AISI Project Final Reports target date	October 15, 2015
Review and approval of AISI Project Final Reports		October 15, 2015 – December 31, 2015

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Appendix 3

Alberta Education Contacts and Resources

For assistance, contact the School Research and Improvement Branch (SRIB) of Alberta Education.

Contact	Phone	Fax
SRIB Office	(780) 427-3160	(780) 415-2481

School Research and Improvement Branch
12th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard
10044 – 108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6

Email: anna.dinatale@gov.ab.ca
maria.crudo@gov.ab.ca

The AISI website provides documents and resources to support project development, implementation, and evaluation. http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi.aspx

Contact Information

School Research and Improvement Branch
Alberta Education
12th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard
10044 – 108 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 5E6
Phone: (780) 427-3160, Fax: (780) 415-2481

ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

AISI Education Partners.
Handbook for AISI cycle 5 projects, 2012-2015 / AISI Education Partners.

Available online: http://education.alberta.ca/media/6657808/handbook_for_aisi_cycle_5_projects.pdf

ISBN 978-0-7785-9740-7 (Print)
ISBN 978-0-7785-9830-5 (Online)

1. School improvement programs – Alberta – Handbooks, manuals, etc.
2. Educational change – Alberta. I. Title. II. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.

LB2822.84.C2 A333 2012 371.207

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Foreword

"AISI is an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today." (*The Learning Mosaic* Summary Report, page 17)[1]

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has been one of Alberta's success stories for more than a decade. When you visit classrooms, schools or school authorities across this province, you hear about and see what AISI projects have done to improve student engagement, learning and performance. Alberta universities have conducted research about what has been happening in AISI and the findings have been published and presented locally, nationally and internationally. AISI has been talked about and written about by international researchers as an example of exceptional work in the field of education. It is a bold approach to improving student learning by encouraging teachers, parents and the broader community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative projects that address local needs. AISI has clearly had a significant impact on education in Alberta and beyond.

Initiated in 1999 by the Alberta Government and its partners, AISI provides targeted funding to school authorities to improve student engagement, learning and performance. Since its inception, school authorities (public, separate, Francophone, charter and private) have initiated about two thousand projects that address local needs and circumstances. Summaries and reports of these projects are on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/aisi.

After four successful three-year cycles (2000 – 2012), AISI is now in its fifth cycle (2012 – 2015).

The AISI Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC)[2] recognized that the foundation for developing Cycle 5 is exceptionally strong. The committee also acknowledged that education is changing and so AISI must be kept vibrant and relevant. The first four cycles provided a solid foundation for innovation, enhanced professional practice, and an emerging culture of research and inquiry, collaboration, responsiveness and improvement. Cycle 5 must build on this foundation and expand into new areas to address the emerging and future needs of education.

[1] Hargreaves, A., et al. (2009). *The Learning Mosaic: A multiple perspectives review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education.

[2] The AISI partnership has resulted in the building of trust, collaboration and teamwork among the following seven education partners who represent diverse interests in providing education for students:

- Alberta Education (AE)
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

To this end, EPSC designed AISI Cycle 5 with an emphasis on three priorities:

- Research Capacity
- Collaborative Cross-School Authority AISI Projects and Networks
- Community Engagement

These three priorities will leverage education transformation through AISI projects while keeping the focus on student engagement, learning and performance and maintaining the grassroots culture.

The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (2009) was one of the primary documents used by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee in developing the framework for Cycle 5. In *The Learning Mosaic*, the researchers indicated the value of creating leadership and support systems related to research and province-wide network architectures that have clear, positive impacts on system-wide outcomes for students. EPSC recognized that provincial support for the three priorities is critical for school authorities to implement successful AISI projects. This support will be established by earmarking some AISI funds for province-wide coordination and leadership in a way that will maximize the benefits of AISI funds for all school authorities.

The *AISI Handbook for Cycle 5 Projects (2012-2015)* has been developed collaboratively by people working on AISI across the province. It has been designed as a reference to provide school authorities with the requirements, guidelines and processes for planning, budgeting, implementing, managing, evaluating, reporting and sharing sustainable AISI projects. It is a guide to support the success of AISI projects and to help ensure that the learning from AISI projects will inform future directions in education.

The handbook includes the goal and principles that form the *Framework for AISI Cycle 5* as well as the characteristics, priorities and requirements for Cycle 5. It also contains three guides to assist school authorities in preparing and submitting project plans and reports:

- *Guide for AISI Project Plans*
- *Guide for AISI Annual Progress Reports*
- *Guide for AISI Project Final Reports*

Appendices include Annual Timelines, References, and Alberta Education Contacts and Resources.

As all of us who work on AISI across the province move forward in Cycle 5, we have the opportunity to share in the excitement and energy that comes with being part of something that is so profoundly impactful!

Acknowledgements

The leadership of the Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) is gratefully acknowledged for guidance in the development of this handbook, which forms the basis for the administration and development of AISI Cycle 5.

The AISI Education Partners consists of the following organizations:

- Alberta Education
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

The AISI partnership has resulted in the building of trust, collaboration and teamwork among the seven education partners who represent diverse interests in providing education for students.

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Framework for AISI Cycle 5[3]

Goal

To improve student learning through initiatives that enhance student engagement and performance and reflect the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority.

Principles

1. AISI projects will focus on student engagement, learning and performance.
2. Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement.
3. AISI reflects the complexity of research, innovation and change processes.
4. The school authority project(s) is/are part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school authority's annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.
5. AISI projects will have a balance of local and provincial measures that include approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures appropriate to the project.
6. AISI project plans will reflect insights from research, literature and related AISI projects.
7. The knowledge generated through AISI will be widely disseminated.
8. Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI will be created and/or enhanced for knowledge dissemination and the exchange of information, ideas and resources.
9. Alberta Education will provide targeted funding to school authorities.

[1] The AISI Partners established the goal, principles and key considerations in 1999. They are included in the *Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (AISI Education Partners Steering Committee, 1999). These have been updated and revised to reflect the evolving nature of AISI in Alberta. The framework and related documents are available on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/aisi.

Priorities for AISI Cycle 5

The following priorities were identified by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) for Cycle 5.

1. Research Capacity

Research and practice are interconnected: research informs practice and practice informs research. The previous cycles of AISI have enabled action-oriented and site-based research in schools across the province. This foundational work needs to be further developed and taken to the next level in order to enable greater innovation, to develop the capacity of teachers as researchers, and to strengthen the learning that can be drawn from AISI projects. Teachers and school authorities will need to continue to engage in research to improve their practice and to create and apply new knowledge to address the changing needs of education.

There will be enhanced opportunities in Cycle 5 for teachers and the school community to:

- build strong connections with universities
- examine current research to inform their AISI projects
- articulate research questions
- gather and analyze relevant data
- analyze findings and derive conclusions
- incorporate findings into their practice
- share findings/lessons with the education community
- read and evaluate published education research findings
- experiment with new strategies/findings from current educational research
- go beyond knowledge sharing to the development of robust models for the transfer of knowledge from the AISI projects

New Requirements for Research:

- Cycle 5 AISI projects will focus on research and improvement.
- There will be a research component for all AISI projects. School authorities will conduct research that focuses on the student learning goal(s) for the project and may also address specific research questions about selected aspects of the project. School authorities will report on their findings as part of their AISI project.
- A minimum expenditure of 10% on research leadership and related support will be required.
- School authorities will submit an AISI Annual Progress Report (AAPR) in place of an AISI Project Annual Report (APAR).

Supports for Research:

- A network to build and support research capacity across the province will be developed, coordinated and resourced.
- EPSC will undertake work on behalf of all projects to address questions of province-wide interest. This will be based on needs identified by AISI projects.
- New technology to support the development and administration of student assessments and surveys and other data collection instruments will be in place for Cycle 5.

2. Collaborative Cross-School Authority AISI Projects and Networks

AISI Cycle 5 represents a move from disconnected or loosely connected projects to a province-wide network of research, improvement and innovation. School authorities will be encouraged to work together to plan, propose and orchestrate shared projects. The renewed emphasis on networks is the EPSC's response to *The Learning Mosaic*'s recommendation in the Summary Report, "to invest in province-wide networks that cut across districts, that reach beyond annual conferences and that incorporate proven design principles of effective network architectures that have clear, positive impacts on system-wide outcomes for students" (p.15).

New Opportunity for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects:

- Two or more school authorities will be able to submit one Collaborative Cross-School Authority Project Plan. These projects will contribute to building lateral capacity by supporting teacher networking and collaboration among schools and across the province, and will enhance knowledge mobilization.

Supports for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects:

- Collaborative cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funding from a newly created funding pool for cross-school authority coordination.
- Provincial coordination will promote and support lateral networks, collaboration and knowledge mobilization.

3. Community Engagement

Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement. Effective school improvement results when principals, teachers, other school staff, students, school councils, parents and other school community members work as a team to establish priorities, set goals for improvement, implement strategies to achieve those goals, and evaluate progress.

In the previous cycles of AISI, there was greater success in an AISI project where formal and informal leaders, teachers, students, parents and the broader community contributed to the project through shared responsibilities (University Research Reviews[4]). These strong partnerships and the trust established in the previous cycles of AISI will form the foundation to strengthen school community engagement.

AISI Cycle 5 will require greater engagement of teachers, students, parents, school community, businesses, universities and other partners during the planning and implementation of research and improvement projects.

New Requirement for Community Engagement:

- All projects will be required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions).

Supports for Community Engagement:

- A rubric has been developed for schools and school authorities to assess the level of community engagement in AISI and to communicate this to stakeholders.
- A virtual learning community will be established to support sharing of best practices for community engagement.

[4] Overall findings from University AISI Research Reviews summarized in AISI Cycle 3 Provincial Report, 2010.

Characteristics of AISI Cycle 5

The following set of descriptions presents the characteristics of AISI as they have developed over the first four cycles and addresses the three priorities for Cycle 5 identified by the Education Partners Steering Committee.

1. Student Focused

   Students are active and engaged learners. AISI projects continue to strengthen the focus on student engagement, learning and performance, and accommodate the diverse learning needs of individual students.

2. Provincial Partnership

   AISI is a provincial partnership among teachers, parents, trustees, superintendents, school business officials, universities and government. The AISI partnership is characterized by trust, collaboration and teamwork among these education partners. The partners share a commitment and a responsibility for improving the education of Alberta students, who are the beneficiaries of this strong and diverse partnership. By working together, the partners continue to develop new relationships, strategies and practices that provide long-term benefits for teaching and learning in Alberta.

3. School Community Engagement

   A school community that is engaged in an AISI project is unified around the clear purpose of improving student engagement, learning and performance, has an inclusive culture that offers a welcoming environment and values diverse membership, and has supportive structures and processes that enable success. Partners in a school community may include administrators, principals, teachers, other school staff, students, school councils, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions.

4. Collaboration

   Collaboration is a critical element for project success. Innovation and effective school improvement result when school community partners work as a team to establish collective priorities, to blend perspectives, expertise and resources, and to share responsibility for student engagement, learning and performance throughout the life of a project and beyond.

5. Catalyst

   AISI is a catalyst for change. The common goal of AISI, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure act in concert to achieve significant change in teaching and learning. AISI projects will leverage educational transformation in Alberta.

6. **Flexibility and Adaptability**
   School authorities, in collaboration with their communities, have the flexibility to design adaptive, innovative AISI projects that enhance student engagement, learning and performance in response to the unique needs and circumstances in the local context.

7. **Culture of Responsiveness and Improvement**
   AISI promotes a culture of responsiveness and improvement that addresses emerging priorities and changing school community contexts. Responsiveness and improvement are shared responsibilities. Schools operating as learning communities actively engage teachers, students, parents and other school community members in learning. Professional learning and ongoing administrative support are critical components in realizing responsiveness and improvement within schools and school authorities.

8. **Research-informed Practice**
   Teachers and school authorities engage in AISI projects to expand their repertoires of best practices and to create and apply new knowledge about powerful learning opportunities for students. As the body of evidence and learning from research on successful practices grow, integration of these practices in new contexts is the challenge and the promise of AISI.

9. **Inquiry and Reflection**
   Inquiry and reflection are dynamic processes that lead to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to teaching and learning. A clear focus on student learning is the foundation for inquiry and reflection.

10. **Building Capacity and Integrating Effective Practices**
    Professional learning continues to ensure that teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices and technologies that are being developed through AISI. Effective professional learning is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. Promising practices, strategies and processes developed or acquired through AISI will benefit Alberta's students in the future.

11. **Shared Leadership**
    AISI is characterized by a complex blend of formal and informal leadership in schools, school authorities and school communities. This blend of leadership empowers participation, ownership and a shared vision of the transformation of education for powerful student learning.

12. Sustainability and Integration

Sustainability involves transference and integration of practices as part of the culture of a school or school authority. AISI projects have a lasting impact on educational practices when what is learned through research and project implementation has been systematically incorporated into schools and school authority practices. There is transferability of effective educational practices to other classrooms and school settings beyond those of project participants.

13. Networks

AISI networks contribute to the exchange of information, ideas and resources as well as communication and knowledge mobilization. Provincial lateral networks cut across school authorities, incorporate proven design principles of effective network architectures, and have clear, positive impacts on authority-wide outcomes for students. Networks include formal and informal interactions, may include face-to-face or digital interactions, and may be local, provincial, national or international.

14. Knowledge Mobilization

The knowledge that AISI contributes to teaching and learning is widely used and applied.

15. Innovation

AISI promotes an environment of innovation in education. Educators are supported in being creative and innovative to make the learning experience powerful for students.

Types of AISI Cycle 5 Projects

In keeping with the priorities for Cycle 5 identified by the Education Partners Steering Committee, two types of AISI projects may be designed, as described in the following table. School authorities may design one or more of each type of project.

Type	Description	Funding
Individual school/school authority	The project is authority-wide or involves a group of schools, a single school, or a single classroom.	Base funding includes funding for a minimum of 10% for research and related leadership and support.
Collaborative cross-school authority	Two or more school authorities work together to design the project.	Base funding includes funding for a minimum of 10% for research and related leadership and support. Additional funding for collaborative cross-school authority coordination may be applied for.

Success Indicators for AISI Cycle 5 Projects

The following indicators of success guide school authorities and the community in the design and implementation of AISI Cycle 5 projects:

- AISI projects provide evidence of improved student engagement, learning and performance.
- AISI projects have elements of innovation.
- AISI contributes to the body of knowledge about improving teaching and learning.
- AISI project results provide examples of promising practices that help to transform teaching and learning.
- Teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices and technologies that are being developed through AISI.
- Knowledge is shared widely through conferences, reports, the AISI website, and provincial networking sessions.
- Established AISI networks contribute to the exchange of information, ideas and resources, as well as to communication, knowledge dissemination and knowledge mobilization.
- AISI contributes to research that informs policy and practice.

Project-specific success indicators will be developed by school authorities, as appropriate.

Requirements for AISI Cycle 5 Projects

The following table lists the basic requirements for all AISI projects. The online AISI Project Plans, Annual Progress Reports and Final Reports that are submitted to Alberta Education are comprised of these requirements.

Basic Requirement	Details
1. Project Design	• Brief Description/Introduction • Statement of Student Learning Goal(s) • Research Question(s) • Literature Review • Methodology • Significance/Contribution to Knowledge • Scope/Limitations

2. Project Strategies and Implementation Plans	• Student Learning Goal(s), Current Situation, Measures and Relevant Evidence
	• Strategies to address student engagement, learning and performance goals, including activities and timelines
	• Implementation Plans
	  ○ School Community Engagement Plan
	  ○ Professional Learning Plan
	  ○ Data Collection and Analysis Plan
	  ○ Knowledge Mobilization Plan
	• Staffing Requirements

3. Project Budget	AISI Base Funding: • Minimum of 15% for Professional Learning • Minimum of 10% for Research and Related Leadership and Support • Maximum of 5% for Project Administration/Coordination • Maximum of 10% for Equipment Further Funding: • Application for additional funding for Collaborative Cross-School Authority Project Coordination
4. Annual Progress Reports	• Preliminary Research Results/Findings • Progress Towards Student Learning Goal(s) • Key Learning • Future Actions/Directions • Evidence of School Community Engagement • Financial Report and Proposed Budget for Next Year
5. Final Report	• Final Results/Findings and Discussion • Evaluation of Achievement of Student Learning Goal(s) • Key Learnings, Conclusions and Recommendations • Financial Report

Guide for AISI Cycle 5 Project Plans

The purpose of this guide is to support the process of project planning and the completion of the AISI online project plan. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the online project plan. The guide contains the following sections:

Section A: Project Type
Section B: Project Parameters
Section C: Project Design
Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans
Section E: Project Budget
Section F: Certification and Submission

Section A: Project Type

Innovative AISI Projects

AISI provides targeted funds to try new things. School authorities are encouraged to try new approaches to address local student needs. Innovation is defined broadly to include research-based strategies that have not been used before in the school authority or its schools. Innovative AISI projects may:

- focus on themes that are brand new to a school authority
- go into greater depth on previous themes with new directions, research, questions, strategies and measures

Individual School Authority Projects

School authorities may choose to develop their own AISI project(s) or work collaboratively with other school authorities to develop and implement a joint project. Individual school authority projects may include:

- all schools in a school authority
- a selected group of schools
- one school
- selected grades/classes within a school
- combinations of any of the above

Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects

Collaborative cross-school authority projects is one of the three priorities for AISI Cycle 5. Collaborative cross-school authority projects in Cycle 5 will further build networks and enhance lateral capacity-building and knowledge mobilization. *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* recommended "target(ing) funding allocations within the overall AISI budget for cross-district collaborative projects" (p. 117), and strengthening AISI networks across school authorities for the further development and continued success of AISI. Extending and deepening collaboration and partnership, according to *The Learning Mosaic*, can be achieved in four ways

- widening the range of collaborative partnerships
- forging stronger connections and networks among schools across districts
- giving collaborative work a more explicitly critical edge
- instigating collaborative relationships of support and assistance between sites (p. 115)

School authorities are encouraged to participate in cross-school authority projects, but is a matter of choice rather than a requirement for AISI Cycle 5.

Additional Funding

Cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funding for project coordination, over and above AISI funds allocated to each of the participating school authorities.

Criteria for Additional Funding

To be eligible for additional funding for coordination, a cross-school authority project must have the following:

- a completed and submitted project budget
- a rationale for additional coordination funds

Funding decisions will be based on:

- anticipated project impacts on student learning
- available funds in the cross-school authority funding pool
- context of participating school authorities (e.g., geographic factors)
- project budget
- project design
- evidence of school community engagement
- knowledge mobilization strategies
- anticipated benefits to participating school authorities
- anticipated benefits to other school authorities and other education stakeholders

Agreement Form

Participating school authorities will complete an agreement form that includes the following:

- name of host school authority
- names of participating school authorities
- description of leadership/governance structure and coordination of the project
- amount of AISI funds to be contributed by each collaborating school authority

Project Submission

Cross-school authority project proposals will include:

- a consolidated project budget or separate budgets for each of the participating school authorities
- a copy of the agreement form signed by the superintendents. This agreement will be submitted as an attachment to the project proposal.

Section B: Project Parameters

This section of the plan provides information about the following details of the project: project ID, title, school authorities involved, schools involved, duration of project, grades and numbers of students, and contact information. As well, further information is provided in the brief description.

Completion of most requirements in this section is straightforward and requires little guidance. The tips below address four of them.

Tips

- *Title*: Keep the title short, but related directly to the anticipated improvements for the selected students.
- *Duration of Project*: Projects usually extend over three years, but projects that extend over one or two years may also be designed.
- *Schools Involved*: Individual school/school authority projects may be district-wide, single-school, or involve a select group of schools. Collaborative cross-school authority projects may involve all schools or selected schools from participating school authorities.
- *Grades and Number of Students*: Estimate the number of students at each grade who will be involved in the project over its duration. If the number varies significantly after the project is approved, revisions can be made.

Brief Description

This part of the plan provides a brief outline of the AISI project. The information will be used to provide the project description in public documents.

Information includes the following aspects of the project:

- background or context for the project
- purpose
- scope
- student learning goal(s)

Tips

– Try to keep the summary brief, but, at the same time, provide sufficient information for others to understand what the project is about. Clarity is key.

Research Leadership

This part of the plan provides a description of how the school authority will address research leadership. Research leadership resides and is developed in each school authority. As their research capacity continues to grow, teachers will become more versatile action researchers in their own classrooms and also have a more active role in the collection, analysis and interpretation of information for the AISI project. Research capacity can be developed in collaboration with internal research expertise, university connections (faculty/graduate students), shared expertise with another school authority, other research institution/agency/organization, or contracted researcher. The AISI Cycle 5 provincial network is a source of collaboration and sharing.

Contact Information

The AISI Coordinator will be the main contact for the School Research and Improvement Branch in the review of project plan(s), progress report(s) and final report(s). Provision is made in the online project plan for identifying other project contacts that can provide additional information about the project and participate in networks. All contacts listed here will be added to the email communication list at the School Research and Improvement Branch, Alberta Education.

Section C: Project Design

AISI Cycle 5 projects focus on research and improvement. The key elements of a project design are a statement of the student learning goal(s), research question(s), literature review, methodology, significance, scope and limitations. A well-planned project design increases the validity of the information that is collected and analyzed. This will allow project teams to more confidently and clearly describe the impact of the project on student engagement, learning and performance. An appropriate methodology allows for effective use of the information gathered during a project. As well, project teams will be able to share their results more readily with others who wish to study the results further or to mobilize the knowledge in their own context.

Statement of Student Learning Goal(s)

The student learning goal(s) describes the improvements in student engagement, learning and performance that are anticipated as a result of the project. The school authority's three-year planning will be helpful to inform the development of the AISI project statement of the student learning goal(s). Although various aspects of the project, such as school climate, staff capacity and parental engagement, are important supports for the attainment of the student learning goal(s), they are not stated as goals in the project plan. Only the student learning goal(s) is to be included here. The measures, success indicators and strategies selected and designed for the project will align with these goals.

Principle 1:
AISI projects will focus on student engagement, learning and performance.

Principle 4:
The school authority project(s) is/are part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school authority's annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.

Tips

- A helpful way to structure a goal statement is to begin with "To".
- Indicate in the goal statement those students who will be selected (e.g., "To increase student engagement and achievement in Mathematics, Grades 1-9").

The student learning goal(s) will be entered in the first column of the table in the online project plan (see Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans).

Research Question(s)

All AISI projects must identify and address one or more research questions that are the focus of the project. The research question(s) must be directly related to the impact the new instructional strategies will have on student engagement, learning or performance and be strongly linked to the student learning goal(s) for the project. Project reports will address the findings of the research conducted during the project relative to the research question(s).

Principle 3:
AISI reflects the complexity of research, innovation and change processes.

A research question is a formal statement about a phenomenon to be studied. It can, in fact, be either a question or a hypothesis. The question or hypothesis accurately and clearly defines what the research will attempt to confirm or discover. It creates the point of departure for a project, which will progress from what is known or believed to be true, as determined by the literature review and environmental scan, to what is hoped to be learned through investigation.

Depending on the scope of the project, school authorities may choose to have an overarching research question as well as several research sub-questions that are more specific in focus.

Tips

- Use the following structure to formulate your research question:
  To what extent (or to what degree) does (the action or strategies the school/school authority is planning to implement) impact (or influence) student engagement, learning and performance for (the population of selected students)?
- Be sure that the research question(s) is linked with the student learning goal(s) of the project.

Literature Review

This section of the AISI Project Plan will provide a brief account of what has been published by scholars and reported in AISI projects relative to the area of inquiry. The purpose of the literature review is twofold: first, to acknowledge and build upon the knowledge base related to a topic and second, to enhance researchers' knowledge about the topic. A well-crafted literature review will ensure the research improves and enhances "the wheel" rather than reinvents it.

Principle 6:
AISI project plans will reflect insights from research, literature and related AISI projects.

The literature review should:

- be related directly to the research question(s)
- synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
- include an explanation of how the literature will influence the AISI project

Tips

- Include references to other AISI projects that are relevant and helpful in planning the project. Projects may be readily searched by keywords and themes on the AISI website, at AISI project search tools.
- Access thematic pages, also posted on the AISI website, where there are links to web-based resources on a variety of themes.
- Determine an appropriate length for the review based on the theme and what is found. Generally three to five pages will be sufficient.
- Work with colleagues in other school authorities who have themes of common interest in the development of the literature review.

Methodology

Methodology[5] is how data are gathered and analyzed and how conclusions that answer the research question(s) are drawn. The type of methodology to be used is determined by the nature of the research question(s).

The description of the methodology to be used should be sufficiently detailed for another school authority to use it to apply the study in another setting.

As part of the AISI project methodology, the project team may also choose to spotlight an aspect of the project, such as the relationship of a specified instructional strategy with the performance of certain students, or the impact of community engagement on student learning. This spotlight might focus on all selected students or on a smaller group and might extend over the cycle of the project or over a shorter time. The focus of this spotlight could be a separate research question or a sub-question under the broader research question.

Tips

- Establish the research question(s) first and then select the methodology that best fits.
- Describe the population or kind of sampling procedure that will be used (e.g., random sample, volunteer sample, stratified sample).
- Describe the kind of measurement instruments that will be used.
- Describe the techniques and tools that will be used to analyze and present project findings.

[5] Supporting information and resources related to research may be accessed on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/project-management.aspx

Significance

An explanation of the significance of the research describes its importance in the local context, its relevance in Alberta, and its place in educational research.

Tips

- Write a few sentences to explain why the project is important and of benefit to the engagement, learning and/or performance of the selected students.
- Describe how this project may contribute to the advancement of teaching and learning in Alberta.
- Think about the potential utility of the project after it is completed. A strong project should pass the "So?" test. (E.g., What difference will it make for students? How will the research inform project implementation?)

Scope and Limitations

Scope defines the range of the project and specifically what it addresses (e.g., grades, ages, student groups, and student competencies).

Limitations refers to what is beyond the scope of the project. It addresses what the project cannot do as well as the limits of what will be learned in terms of its transferability to other contexts.

Tips

- When defining the scope, briefly restate the purpose of the project and who are the selected students. State who is working in the project and what areas are being addressed.
- Keep in mind that all projects have limits.

Other Aspects

Other aspects of the project design include ethics and an environmental scan. Although these aspects are not included in the online project plan(s), they should be part of the school authority's design process.

Ethics

Any work and processes involving people should to adhere to ethical principles and practices that respect the dignity and preserve the well-being of all people involved. Ethical considerations include:

- no harming of any person involved (students, parents, staff, community)
- subject's right to privacy

Ensure that the project complies with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP) and the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), as applicable.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan is a compilation of information about events, trends and relationships that will influence the student learning goal(s) and design of the project. It extends beyond the school authority, drawing relevant information from sources such as government initiatives and other AISI projects. It also looks within the school authority, drawing from sources such as focus groups, interviews, needs assessments, surveys, and student data. School community engagement processes may inform and be informed by the environmental scan.

Tips

- Be sure to include information about student learning needs. This is essential for developing the student learning goal(s).
- Use the environmental scan and literature review to develop the student learning goal(s) and the overall project design.

Section D: Project Strategies and Implementation Plans

This section of the online project plan addresses how improvements will be achieved – that is, the strategies and implementation plans that are expected to bring about improvements in student engagement, learning and performance.

Student Learning Goal(s)

In Section C: Project Design, a statement of the student learning goal(s) was indicated. This goal statement described the improvements in student engagement, learning and performance that are anticipated as a result of the project.

Tips

- Enter this statement of the student learning goal(s) in the first column of the table in the online project plan.

Current Situation

The current situation is a narrative description and/or numeric value, based on qualitative and/or quantitative data. A clear and accurate account of the current situation is foundational to many other aspects of a project's design. It allows appropriate success indicators to be set and makes it easier to determine the impact of the project.

Tips

- Include information about the data sources and the timeframe.
- Describe a group of students that is comparable to the group identified in the student learning goal(s).
- Use the present tense in describing the current situation.

Measures

The purpose of measurement is to provide evidence of the impact on student engagement, learning and performance. Therefore, the measures must be appropriately aligned with the anticipated improvements described in the student learning goal(s).

As appropriate to the study, project plans should include a balance of local and provincial measures. There is no recommended percentage for this balance in AISI Cycle 5 projects. The use of readily available provincial measures is encouraged, where appropriate and reasonable. There should also be a balance, where appropriate, of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Principle 5:
AISI projects will have a balance of local and provincial measures that include approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures appropriate to the project.

Qualitative measures provide rich, transferable descriptions of individuals' experience of educational phenomena, with a focus on process, meaning and human behaviours as they occur in context. Sources of evidence might include: interview transcripts, written reports (e.g., observation field notes), focus group transcripts, video or audio recordings (e.g., recordings of classroom activities), artifacts, documents and portfolios (e.g., personal and professional journals and artwork), and analysis of comments on surveys.

Quantitative measures use numeric data. Sources of evidence might include standardized tests, local assessments (e.g., teacher marks and school authority-wide assessments), school records (e.g., attendance, student behaviour, credits and course completion), provincial achievement tests, diploma examinations, participation rates, high school completion rates, drop-out rates, Rutherford Scholarship eligibility, transition rates, local surveys and provincial surveys.

Since each AISI project reflects the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority, there is no minimum or maximum number of measures. The number of measures should be sufficient to demonstrate "evidence of success" in terms of progress and final outcomes.

Tips

- Avoid allowing the measurement instruments to "drive" the project design. That is, establish the student learning goal(s) first and then select or develop the measures that will help determine how well the goal(s) is attained.
- Use a variety of measures to inform the research question(s).

Relevant Evidence

In the spirit of backward design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005), it is strongly recommended that evidence indicating the success of the student learning goal(s) is identified before plans for instructional strategies and professional learning are considered. In this way, the student learning goal(s) is "operationalized" by answering the question "What would we accept as evidence that the student learning goal(s) has been achieved?"

The following table provides examples of relevant evidence for qualitative and quantitative measures that a project team might set based on different current situations.

Example 1

Current Situation	**Relative Evidence for Quantitative Measures**
Over the past three years, high school completion results have indicated that an average of only 74.8% of our students graduate three years after beginning high school.	High school completion results will indicate that 80% of students entering Grade 10 in 2012 will graduate in three years. School records of selected students' attendance will indicate that student attendance has increased by 5%.

Example 2

Current Situation	**Relevant Evidence for Qualitative Measures**
Evidence from anecdotal comments on student and teacher surveys over the past several years has indicated that students are passive learners who feel that schooling is done to them.	Data collected through transcripts of student focus groups will indicate that students are satisfied with opportunities to be involved in their own assessment. Samples of student self-reflections will indicate growth in students' ability to set goals and self-assess.

Tips

- For quantitative measures, set targets that are reasonable and attainable, based on prior performance.
- For qualitative measures, write a description of what it would look like if success has been attained for the student learning goal(s).
- Indicate how the relevant evidence will be measured and reported upon, including timelines, where appropriate.

Instructional Strategies to Achieve the Student Learning Goal(s)

This part of the project plan describes the new instructional strategies that will be developed and/or identified to help attain the student learning goal(s) identified in the project.

Instructional strategies, and the plans for implementing them, may change during the course of the project, based on various factors, such as the changing needs of students, professional reflection, the introduction of additional strategies, and the analysis of project data.

Tips

- Describe the strategies sufficiently to be easily understood by readers.
- Focus on what will happen for students rather than on professional learning.
- Include timelines for each strategy, as appropriate.

School Community Engagement Plan

School community engagement is one of the three priorities for Cycle 5. *The Learning Mosaic* identified the following important area for growth: "increased parent and community engagement in the focus of AISI projects and throughout the whole AISI process" (p. 6).

Principle 2:
Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement.

AISI Cycle 5 projects must include plans for how the community will be engaged throughout the life of the project, as it is developed, implemented, evaluated and celebrated. The school community includes teachers, administrators, other school staff, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions. "All projects will be required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders..." (p. 3 of the Handbook).

An engaged community consists of many different people and organizations who are involved in different ways, to different degrees, at different times, and in different contexts. In an engaged community, some members may be involved by staying informed or by informing others, while others may be participating in activities at a school. Some members may be part of a steering committee, while others may be represented by members of that committee. Some members may seldom come to a school, but actively support student engagement, learning and performance in other ways. Some members who were not involved in the planning stage of the project may be heavily involved during the implementation. Thus, a project is most effectively supported not only by the diversity of people and organizations that are involved, but also by the diverse ways in which they are involved, in terms of how, when, where and why.

There are two main groups of people who need to be engaged, in various ways, in the planning, implementing, evaluating, and celebrating of AISI projects:

- those who will implement the project including teachers, administrators, students, and parents
- those providing representation for key partner groups, including school councils, ATA local, student councils, and elected school officials

In addition, individuals and representatives from the broader community may engage in a variety of ways to contribute to AISI project success.

Even though different people are involved in different ways, it is essential to an AISI project's success that the people who are at the core of the project — teachers, administrators, students, and parents — are actively involved in all aspects of the project throughout its cycle. Others in the school community provide support for the project by:

- supporting those at the core of the project
- supporting students' learning in school and in the community
- being knowledgeable about and advocating for the project
- celebrating project successes that result in improved student engagement, learning and performance

Community engagement thrives when the conditions are right. In an AISI project, these conditions are:

- a *clear purpose* of improving student engagement, learning and performance
- an *inclusive culture* that values diverse membership
- *supportive structures and processes* that enable engagement

These conditions are established in the planning stages of the project and are deliberately strengthened throughout a project to allow engagement to develop and thrive.

As a school community becomes more engaged in an AISI project, members see growth in the following aspects of their shared experience:

- *diversity* of the community involved in the project
- *opportunity the* community has to be involved in the project
- *understanding* the community has of the project
- *support* the community provides for those implementing the project and for students' learning in and out of school
- *ownership* the community has for the project's progress
- *celebration* by the community of the project's successes

A *School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum*[6] has been developed to help school authorities reflect on the levels of community engagement in their AISI project. The rubric may help school authorities to:

- describe community engagement in the local context
- establish expectations for community engagement
- determine how to help community engagement improve
- communicate with stakeholders about engagement

The process for determining the profile of school community engagement in an AISI project is one of informed and collaborative judgement. The rubric and continuum provide a framework for school authorities to make this judgement, but are not measurement instruments. The evidence on which the judgements are made may be assembled from various measures, such as surveys, meeting minutes, discussion notes and anecdotal notes.

AISI Project Plans are required to include a School Community Engagement Plan. This plan will show how the community will be actively and meaningfully engaged throughout the life of the project, and will be reported on annually.

Tips!

- Consider questions such as the following: Who will be consulted? How will decisions be made? How will responsibilities be shared? How will school community members be involved in project evaluation? How will successes be shared and celebrated?
- Describe the strategies that will engage various stakeholders in project implementation. Include timelines where appropriate.
- Describe how teachers and other staff members will be engaged in project planning, implementation, evaluation, and celebration.
- Consider how parents and other school community members will support students' engagement, learning and performance.
- Consider communication strategies and organizational structures to support community engagement.

[6] The School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum is available on the AISI website at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/project-management.aspx

Professional Learning Plan

A comprehensive professional learning plan in support of project implementation is an important part of the AISI Project Plan. In *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (2010), teachers' professional growth is identified as an essential condition for successful implementation. The accomplishment of an educational change is dependant upon "coordinated, collaborative and comprehensive professional learning plans" (p. 7).

Findings from AISI have shown that effective professional learning is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. Examples include teacher mentorship, instructional coaching, and professional learning communitites. For more information about planning professional learning, see *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (2005).

Professional learning is expected to account for a minimum of 15% of the project budget. Expenses may include resources, materials, external consultants, teacher release costs, travel, accommodation, facilities, and other costs related to professional learning activities.

Tips

- Describe the professional learning opportunities that will be developed, indicate who will be involved, and provide a timeline for anticipated events.
- Describe how professional learning will be integrated into instructional strategies.
- Describe strategies, procedures or processes that will help to develop commitment to the project.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

The Learning Mosaic identified the following issue related to data collection in AISI projects:

> "The data base consists of data aggregated to the level of average scores on individual measures within each project. The raw data from which these aggregates have been developed consist of achievement scores for individual students and attitude/satisfaction scores for students, teachers and parents. However, the individual scores are not recorded in the data base. Much of the variation in individual scores is lost in the aggregation. "This precludes the use of techniques such as multilevel analysis, which can separate within-project variation from between project variation" (p. 30).

As a result, the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee has recommended that Cycle 5 project plans include plans for data collection at the individual student level[7]. Retaining data at the individual student level throughout a project will strengthen the validity of the research and allow for varied and detailed analysis. For example, it will allow school authorities to analyze results only for selected students rather than analyze aggregated totals that may include students who were not involved in the project.

Resources and timelines should be put in place for the collection and analysis of data, including a description of who will be involved, a summary of what instruments will be used, and a description of how data will be aggregated, disaggregated, and analyzed. Ongoing collection and reflection on progress toward project goals will allow school authorities to:

- identify preliminary research findings
- recognize and respond to participant needs
- build on innovative strategies and practices
- determine future actions

The AISI networks established in Cycle 5 are integral to the collaboration across the province to strengthen data collection and analysis. These networks are a means of support and provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue for school authorities.

Tips

— Determine the disaggregation of data that will be most useful, such as by gender, age, mobility, duration of participation, ESL, and learning needs.

Knowledge Mobilization Plan

School authorities are required to create a knowledge mobilization plan that identifies strategies for dissemination and anticipated application of key learnings from AISI projects.

Principle 7:
The knowledge generated through AISI will be widely disseminated.

[7] Results cannot be released on an individual student basis. Release must be in compliance with The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP), and the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).

Project teams and AISI partners will share responsibility for knowledge dissemination through networks and other means. Potential audiences include school community members and people and organizations beyond the school authority, such as education researchers. Ways to disseminate research findings and key findings from an AISI project include:

- school/school authority newsletters
- school/school authority websites
- displays (e.g., school bulletin boards, community boards)
- publications (e.g., fact sheets, brochures, videos)
- presentations (e.g., AISI Conferences, workshops, board meetings)
- events (e.g., open houses, celebrations)
- media releases
- articles (e.g., *The School Research and Improvement SCOOP*, the *AIA News*)
- Promising Practices for the AISI website
- scholarly journals (e.g., *AISI Journal*)

Principle 8:
Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI will be created and/or enhanced for knowledge dissemination and the exchange of information, ideas and resources.

Tips

- Ensure that AISI project(s) are acknowledged at events and in publications.

Moving from knowledge dissemination to knowledge mobilization means going beyond sharing findings to putting them into action. School authorities are encouraged to create robust models to support this mobilization and to include activities and timelines in the Knowledge Mobilization Plan.

Supporting knowledge mobilization means bringing people together to move from only sharing and discussing what they are learning toward exploring the implications for their work in school improvement. Strategies include:

- networks (local, national, international) to exchange or develop information, ideas and resources
- communities of practice to incorporate and build upon findings and key learnings from AISI projects
- events (e.g., workshops, symposia) to discuss what has been learned from AISI projects and to explore connections and implications for future actions and directions

Tips

- Describe how students, teachers, parents, elected officials, other school community members and wider audiences will be made aware of project findings. Include timelines, where appropriate.
- Describe the anticipated events that will bring together educators and education partners to discuss what has been learned from AISI projects and to explore the connections and implications for future school improvement. Include timelines, where appropriate.

Staffing Requirements

This part of the plan identifies the people whose formally identified roles in the project are paid for through the AISI budget. This may include AISI coordinators, coaches, lead teachers, researchers, other professionals, teaching assistants, and administrative support staff.

Tips

- Enter how much of a full-time equivalent (FTE) will be funded by the AISI budget for each staff member (e.g., AISI Coordinator 0.8 FTE).
- Describe the key activities for each staff member and provide an estimate of the percentage of his or her AISI time that these activities will take.
- Use the job titles rather than the names of staff members.

Section E: Project Budget

AISI Coordinators and Secretary-Treasurers/Chief Financial Officers should work collaboratively to ensure alignment, consistency and accuracy of the AISI budget within the school authority budget.

AISI Funding Requested

AISI funding is available to all Alberta school authorities (public, separate, francophone, charter and private schools) and includes the two Lloydminster School Divisions (Alberta Regulation 51/97).

Principle 9:
Alberta Education will provide targeted funding to school authorities.

A school authority may submit one or more individual projects and/or one or more collaborative cross-school authority projects. However, the total funding requested cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement.

The funding entitlement to a school authority for a school year is based upon the previous year's September 30th registered student count (ECS students counted as 0.5 FTE) times the per-student rate. The annual per-student rate is determined by dividing the total available funding for the year by the total "eligible" provincial enrolment count. (Consult the *Funding Manual* for current rates.)

Funding flows to school authorities beginning in September of the first year of the cycle and is based upon submission of an AISI Project Plan and subsequent project approval by the School Research and Improvement Branch of Alberta Education. For subsequent years, funding flows upon submission and approval of the AISI Annual Progress Report.

Funding from Other Sources

A school authority can combine the AISI funds with funding from other sources (internal or external) in order to implement larger or more comprehensive projects. Funding from other sources should be specified in the project plan.

Transfers from Other Projects

With approval from the School Research and Improvement Branch, school authorities may phase out projects and submit new plans or redirect funds to existing projects.

Collaborative Cross-School Authority Projects

Collaborative cross-school authority projects may be eligible for additional funds for project coordination. This funding will be over and above AISI funds allocated to each of the participating school authorities.

AISI Project Expenses

The method of allocating AISI funds within a school authority is a local decision based on local needs and circumstances. However, there are four areas with minimum and/or maximum expense requirements.

1) ***Professional Learning***
   Professional learning will account for a minimum of 15% of an AISI project budget. Costs for professional learning include salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for leading or delivering professional learning activities. Other costs associated with professional learning are broken into four types of expenses:
   - (substitute) costs to release teachers for professional learning activities
   - materials/resources used in professional learning activities
   - travel/accommodation/meal costs incurred at professional learning activities
   - fees for external experts or registration fees for professional learning activities

2) ***Research Capacity***
   Research capacity is one of the three priorities for Cycle 5. In order to enable greater innovation, to develop the capacity of teachers as researchers, and to strengthen the learning that can be drawn from AISI projects, research and related leadership and support will account for at least 10% of an AISI project budget. This may include:
   - salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for research

- contracts with external researchers (fee for services, office supplies, travel expenses, and other business costs incurred by the researcher)
- costs associated with the literature review, research methods and data collection and analysis

3) ***Project Management***

Project management and administration will account for a maximum of 5% of an AISI project budget. Costs for project management include salaries and benefits for full/part-time staff members employed by the school authority and responsible for project management. Other costs for project management may include:

- office supplies
- travel/accommodation/meals associated with project management duties
- business expenses related to project management

4) ***Equipment and Other Capital***

Equipment and/or other capital costs will account for a maximum of 10% of an AISI project budget. Equipment may include computers, interactive whiteboards and other items, as long as their purchase is appropriate to the AISI project.

Section F: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Project Plan is accurate, reliable, valid and complete.

Requirements for certification:

- The AISI Project is research-based
- Information provided in the AISI Project Plan is accurate, reliable, valid and complete
- There is meaningful engagement and support of key partner representatives, including school councils, ATA local, student councils, and elected school officials.
- There are processes in place for ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- Budget is accurate and complete
- FOIP/PIPA compliance regarding names in the proposal and/or attachments
- Documentations and records are being kept to support what is reported in the Project Proposal and Annual Progress Reports

The target date for submission of AISI Cycle 5 Project Plans to the School Research and Improvement Branch is April 30.

Guide for AISI Annual Progress Reports (AAPR)

At the end of each year, school authorities are required to submit an AISI Annual Progress Report (AAPR) to the School Research and Improvement Branch. The target date for submission of progress reports is October 15th.

The purpose of this guide is to support the process of completing the online AAPR. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the report. The guide contains the following sections:

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress toward the Student Learning Goal(s)
Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement
Section III: Financial Report
Section IV: Certification and Submission

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress Toward the Student Learning Goal(s)

Results and Discussion

In Cycle 5, progress reports are expected to provide reflections on preliminary research findings and on progress toward achieving the student learning goal(s). *Results Tables* are included in the reporting template for school authorities to track interim data for measures related to the student learning goal(s). Project leaders are encouraged to update this section regularly throughout the life of the project[8].

The preliminary research data may indicate a trend toward achieving desired results, or they may not. Either way, it is important to document the results and interpret what may be having an impact on student engagement, learning and/or performance. Even if results are inconclusive, there will be something of value to discuss.

Tips

- Consider what formats will represent data in the most meaningful way (e.g., tables, figures and graphs).
- Use the text field in the online report to summarize key results and to clarify points, as needed.
- Describe links or correlations that may be apparent in the data. For example, if the evidence collected indicates that an instructional strategy has been effective with a particular group of students, discuss this here. Explain why this may be happening.

[8] It is expected that results collected and reported in the *Results Tables* will reflect what was stated in the Data Collection and Analysis Plan that is part of the AISI Project Plan.

- Discuss both the findings related to the research questions and the progress toward the student learning goal(s).
- Disaggregation of data is very helpful in the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Key Learnings to Date

The purpose of this part of the report is to describe what is working well and what is not working well in the project. Discussion may include instructional strategies, professional learning, data collection, and school community engagement.

Tips

- Highlight any effective practices that are making a difference for student engagement, learning or performance and that might be shared with other people.
- Organize the information around the research question(s).

Future Actions/Directions

Adjustments or modifications that will be made in the project are outlined here. These changes may be related to instructional strategies, models for professional learning, strategies for engaging the community, strategies for data collection and analysis, or to any other aspect of the project that will have an impact on student engagement, learning or performance. If the research component of the project has identified effective practices, school authorities will likely want to apply this practice on a larger scale.

Tips

- The actions described here will flow naturally from the key learnings achieved since the implementation of the project.

Attachments

School authorities are encouraged to attach other documents that may provide further information related to the project. This may include information related to additional research studies within the project.

Tips

- Formats may include Word, PDF, and Excel.
- Links to videos or other artifacts housed on the school authority website may also be included as attachments.

Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement

AISI projects are required to demonstrate active and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, elected officials, businesses, organizations and institutions). School authorities will use this section of the AISI Annual Progress Report to describe activities that have engaged members of the school community.

Tips

- Use the School Community Engagement Rubric and Continuum to help reflect on the ways in which the community has been engaged.
- Consider ways to demonstrate evidence of the support of key stakeholders (e.g., surveys of perceived engagement).

Section III: Financial Report

School authorities report actual funding and expenses in this section of the AISI Annual Progress Report. Also required in this section is a proposed budget that includes projected funding and expenses for the following year.

Tips

- Ensure that projected expenses align with funding requirements outlined in the AISI Project Plan.

Section IV: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Annual Progress Report is accurate, reliable, valid and complete.

The target date for submission of AISI Annual Progress Reports (AAPR) is October 15th in each of the first two years of the project.

Guide for AISI Project Final Reports (APFR)

At the end of the final year of an AISI project, school authorities are required to submit an AISI Project Final Report (APFR) for each project, to the School Research and Improvement Branch.

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate the process of completing the online APFR. The guide is aligned with the sections and sub-sections of the report. The guide contains the following sections:

Section I: Preliminary Research Findings and Progress toward the Student Learning Goal(s)
Section II: Evidence of School Community Engagement
Section III: Financial Report
Section IV: Certification and Submission

Section I: Final Research Findings and Discussion

Results

The purposes of this section are to present the results of the research and to report the final results on student measures for engagement, learning and performance.

The research results should include a summary description of the data collected relative to the research question(s).

Tips:

- Provide data that is relevant to the research question(s) and the student learning goal(s).
- Include any unanticipated results that may have been identified. These can be valuable to the project and to others interested in the impact of the project.
- Identify what did not work as anticipated. This is valuable information to share and learn from.

Final data collected from quantitative and/or qualitative measures are entered in the *Results Tables*. Interim results that were collected throughout the project will provide additional information and should be included in the tables, as appropriate.

Tips:

- Ensure that the type of results collected and reported in the *Results Tables* correspond to the Data Collection and Analysis Plan in the project plan.

Discussion and Interpretation of Results

The interpretation of findings is a critical part of research. This is the process of explaining any links and correlations apparent in the data. For example, if the evidence collected indicates that an instructional strategy has been effective with a particular group of students, a discussion about why this may have happened should be included here.

The collection of student-level data makes flexible aggregation, disaggregation, and varied analysis possible (e.g., by gender, age, mobility, duration of participation, ESL, and FNMI), thereby allowing for meaningful interpretation of results.

Tips

- Provide a brief overview of how data were aggregated, disaggregated, and analyzed.
- Describe what has been learned from the results.
- Use tables, figures and graphs to illustrate links and correlations apparent in the data. Clarify the results in tables, figures and graphics with additional text.

Evaluation of the Achievement of the Student Learning Goal(s)

Since the achievement of the student learning goal(s) is at the heart of the project, an evaluation of the impact the project has had on student engagement, learning and performance is the most important part of the final report. This evaluation must be substantiated by the data entered in the *Results Tables*.

Tips

- Consider what has changed in the classroom. How has student engagement, learning and performance been impacted? Focus on what changed, rather than on why it has changed. The next part of this section provides for an explanation of why the results were achieved.
- Close the section with a statement about the overall impact on student engagement, learning and performance.
- Avoid discussion here of other aspects of the project, such as professional learning or community engagement, and focus only on changes in student engagement, learning and performance.

Key Learnings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The research question was the point of departure for the AISI project. The information provided in this part of the AISI Project Final Report is the point of closure.

It is important to place the findings in the context of the research identified in the literature review. The intent of the conclusions and recommendations is to contribute to the body of knowledge about teaching and learning. The results of the project may confirm what is already known, add to something that is already known, or may uncover something new.

The project team will identify the overarching big ideas that have come out of the project. Having already discussed and evaluated results in earlier parts of the report, in this section the team will highlight the effective project strategies. These are practices that the research findings have shown to have made a difference for students and that will be shared with others, such as new approaches to professional learning and innovative strategies to meaningfully engage the school community.

This part of the report may also include discussion about what did not work well in the project. Reflections about strategies that did not work will provide valuable information for others interested in similar work.

In addition to identifying the key learnings that have arisen from the project, the project team will use this part of the report to make recommendations for further study. Recommendations may identify questions that another researcher or school authority can expand upon for their own research project. The section may also include suggestions or advice to others wishing to embark on a similar project or study.

The conclusions and recommendations section will contribute to the body of knowledge about teaching and learning. The results of the project may confirm what is already known, add to something that is already known, or may uncover something new.

Tips

- Describe what was powerful in the project.
- Describe how the research findings tie into the body of research highlighted in the literature review.

Attachments

School authorities are encouraged to attach other documents that may provide further information related to the project. This may include information related to additional research studies within the project.

Tips

- Formats may include Word, PDF, and Excel documents.
- Links to videos or other artifacts housed on the school authority website may also be included as attachments.

Section II: Financial Report

Full Account of AISI Funding with Actual Expenses

School authorities are expected to report actual funding and expenses in this section of the AISI Project Final Report. It is an expectation that the AISI funding entitlement received by a school authority be expended by the end of the project.

Section III: Certification and Submission

The Superintendent/CEO is responsible for certifying that the information provided in the AISI Project Final Report is accurate, reliable, valid, and complete.

The target date for submission of the AISI Project Final Report (APFR) is October 15th of the final year of the project.

Appendix 1

Annual Timelines

Alberta Education	School Authority	Date
Ministerial announcement confirming Cycle 5 funding		September 21, 2011
Framework for Cycle 5 available for school authorities		October 25, 2011
Handbook for AISI Cycle 5 projects available for school authorities		December 2011
Support for school authorities in project development	Project planning and development	December 2011 April 2012
Budget announcement for AISI Cycle 5 funding		February 2012 (anticipated)
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 1 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2012
	Target date for submission of AISI Project Plans	April 30, 2012
Review and approval of project plans		May 2012 September 2012
Year 1		
Funding payments to school authorities for approved projects	Project implementation	September 2012 – August 2013
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 2 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2013
	AISI Annual Progress Reports target date	October 15, 2013
Review and approval of AISI Annual Progress Reports		October 15, 2013 – December 31, 2013

Alberta Education	School Authority	Date
Year 2		
Funding payments to school authorities upon approval of AISI Annual Progress Report	Project implementation	September 2013 – August 2014
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
AISI funding allocations to school authorities for Year 3 of Cycle 5		April 1, 2014
	AISI Annual Progress Reports target date	October 15, 2014
Review and approval of AISI Annual Progress Reports		October 15, 2014 – December 31, 2014
Year 3		
Funding payments to school authorities upon approval of AISI Annual Progress Report	Project implementation Project evaluation	September 2014 – August 2015
Project support for school authorities		Ongoing
	AISI Project Final Reports target date	October 15, 2015
Review and approval of AISI Project Final Reports		October 15, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Appendix 2

References

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Appendix 3

Alberta Education Contacts and Resources

For assistance, contact the School Research and Improvement Branch (SRIB) of Alberta Education.

Contact	Phone	Fax
SRIB Office	(780) 427-3160	(780) 415-2481

School Research and Improvement Branch
12th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard
10044 – 108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6

Email: anna.dinatale@gov.ab.ca
maria.crudo@gov.ab.ca

The AISI website provides documents and resources to support project development, implementation, and evaluation. http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi.aspx